

THE PLAIN VIEW

OCTOBER 1948

The Profit Motive in the Film Industry

ROY BOULTING

The Crime of Oscar Wilde

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A HUMANIST JOURNAL CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RELATIONS AND WITH
THE QUALITY OF LIVING

Οὐδέν ικανόν ἢ ὀλίγον το ικανόν

—EPICURUS

Nothing is sufficient for him to whom what is sufficient seems little

UBERTATES ET COPIAE VIRTUTIS

—CICERO

the productiveness and the resources of human quality

THIS IS THAT WHICH WILL INDEED DIGNIFY AND EXALT KNOWLEDGE, IF
CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION MAY BE MORE NEARLY AND STRAITLY
CONJOINED AND UNITED TOGETHER THAN THEY HAVE BEEN; A
CONJUNCTION LIKE UNTO THAT OF THE TWO HIGHEST PLANETS, SATURN
THE PLANET OF REST AND CONTEMPLATION, AND JUPITER, THE PLANET
OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACTION.

—BACON

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COMMENTARY

MALTHUS TO-DAY. In our issue of April, 1945 we commented on the problem which would face the proposed Food and Agricultural Organization, and looked "with the greatest eagerness for the appointment of a Director General of proved energy and capacity." Sir John Boyd Orr, unanimously elected by the first conference three years ago, has equipped himself by his initiatives and experience in office to play another part now that he is unhampered by direct official responsibilities. Taking as his text the plain facts, he is free to preach and to prophesy, warning the peoples of the world against the madness of their governments if they will not co-operate quickly on a global scale to forestall famine and organize plenty. Sir John has not resigned because he is disillusioned about FAO. On the contrary, he is confident that such agencies of UNO will work, and can be used to take urgent questions of common human welfare out of politics. The shortage of food and the certainty of large-scale famine unless imaginative action is taken to prevent it makes a test case. Here is a world-wide appeal to universal fear and hope, conscience and common sense: the peril has been measured and scientific resources, if they are mobilized and applied, are known to be equal to dealing with it. Are the peoples of the world going to allow insane governmental and ideological conflicts to stand in the way, and let the world drift to universal ruin? The issue is between sense and ideologies, peoples and governments, science and politics. Sir John has one eye on the food situation and the drift to famine, and one eye on the political situation and the drift to war. He is trying to use the general alarm, the urgency of two real dangers, to prove the efficacy of "the functional approach" to world order. He has the pledged support of the numerous voluntary associations in this country which share his concern. This is a considerable body of active organized opinion, not without influence. (It will be recalled that, on Mr. Bevin's suggestion, the Foreign Ministers collaborating in Western Union agreed to leave questions of federal structure to private initiative.) Sir John thinks that the British Commonwealth has the experience and the prestige to take the initiative in getting the co-operation of the nations through the UN specialized agencies in a great world plan of reconstruction and development. We said in our issue of April 1945, and we still believe, that there is no better line for British policy. However, it is a long-term policy in which we should have begun early and been found consistent. It is not an emergency policy to solve the crisis and relax political deadlock, and no such hope of it should be entertained.

There remains the actual world food shortage and danger of

famine. In his Sanderson-Wells Lecture in May, Sir John Orr relates world population estimates to world food resources, showing on present trends a rising tide of world population and a falling reservoir of land fertility. The fertility trend will have to be reversed and the world food output doubled in the next twenty-five years, or there will be mass-starvation. This is the return of Malthus with a vengeance, not merely the temporary shortage of hand-to-mouth living because stocks are run down after six years of world war. Malthus disturbed the peace of mind of two generations, but his theory pre-supposed fixed limits to the employment of labour and the production of food and when the unforeseen expansion of industrial and agricultural production kept pace with the expansion of population his argument was forgotten like a bad dream. Nevertheless, there are limits, which, thanks to reckless exploitation and destruction of fertility, are not now over the horizon. Laissez-faire which gave us expansion based on exploitation and opportunism, cannot give us continued expansion based on conservation, development, and allocation. The situation requires the concentration of responsibility and power, and not merely in the hands of sovereign national states. Sir John Orr calls for a World Food Board. But of course the institution of such an authority would not pass by the political problem; and the question is whether it would be able to deal with it. In the 19th century, John Stuart Mill, than whom there was no more humane and enlightened person in English public life, despaired of economic equality because, on Malthusian principles, to raise the standard of the workers was simply to bring down all to destitution. The error was in psychology rather than in economics: ultimately, it turned out that to raise standards was to give standards, and to have standards was an effective check on population. Thus Malthus's own argument worked when the pump was primed; the workers when they got a start took his advice. But is it safe to assume that this experience will be repeated on a world scale in the case of the teeming millions of India and China; or that western nations accustomed to high standards are prepared to take the risk? The World Food Council exists, but it is too simple to think that all would be well if it were given the executive powers of a Board. The political problems are real. They need not be insoluble, and administrative and technological developments have an immense contribution to make to their solution. It would be more hopeful if the politically minded would recognize this, and if scientists and administrators and technicians (and idealists) would recognize the political problems. A one-sided approach to these great questions of ultimate common interest is worse than a wasted effort; it aggravates the modern malaise of confusion and frustration so dangerous to democracy.

A PROPOS REASON. Kung-sun Lung, a leading exponent of the Chinese School of Dialecticians in the 4th century B.C., has a *Discussion on a White Horse* in which he proves by elegant arguments, "A white horse is not a horse." Of course it follows from the same arguments that a white horse is not white. This is hardly horse sense and it is not surprising that these arguments excited a good deal of the indignant contempt which philistines always and everywhere love to lavish on such superior products of sophisticated spirits. Thus Johnson refuted Berkeley. Of course nothing in the arguments is intended against ordinary usage: no collision is possible between, say, a material object and its definition. However, even upper wits who are not afraid to override horse sense are not always above horse play, and their paradoxes addressed to the learned may intend irrelevant offence to the unlearned.

Strangely, when the logical analyst turns from the harmless but annoying paradoxes of metaphysics to serious consideration of what people actually think and say, and begins to interfere with "the comforts of unreason", he makes no enemies. All are (or pretend to be) amused. Because of course all are guilty of enjoying these comforts: it is only human. Nevertheless we bite our lips and resolve to be very superior in future. And the evidence goes on accumulating for further books—and always will.

However, those who like their rationality perfect can be comforted just now by the good example of the Government whose propaganda has so far never swerved from the reasons of discomfort.

Some make big stuff, some make small;
More from each is more for all.

Here is reason, with rhyme thrown in, and the reasoning is consistently good, quite up to the logic of "work or want" with which the campaign started. How much less reason have we and more comfort in believing that beer is best or Guinness good for us. It is true the Government hasn't a very attractive line to sell, but that was never yet a handicap on good copy writers. A writer in the *Times Literary Supplement* the other day on the English Character, for instance, did very well with the same line, and a special reprint of his piece sold like that best line of all, hot cakes. This friendly person, an outside admirer of our excellence, not a Miltonic Narcissus of our own (subtle), pretended to paint the portrait warts and all (more subtle), and completed it with a big question mark (most subtle). What people! What history! What destiny? It made the most exciting noise, the very sound to shoo the eagle into flight. Unfortunately, it is to be feared not many readers of the *Times Literary Supplement* are makers of big stuff or of small. And thereby hangs a tale, and the biggest question of all.

THE PROFIT MOTIVE IN THE FILM AND GENERAL ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY

FROM the outset, it has been a characteristic of the entertainment business in general, but quite especially of that branch of it which is concerned with the cinema, that large sums of money be expended in attaining the desired result. For that reason, the question of profit making in the film industry has been more persistently before the public eye than that of any other trade, save possibly the Stock Exchange. The rise of the big film magnates, the speculative chaos of the thirties when over three million pounds were lost in two years, the various "quota" acts and the notorious "quickies" they brought into existence, and the more recent problem of film dollars have been so intimately on the public conscience for so long that it may come as something of a shock, and will even be regarded by some as glaring hypocrisy on my part, if I say that the profit motive, while providing the mechanism which "keeps the motion picture moving" in this country and in the United States, is only one of a number of factors which contribute to the making of films. And I would venture to say that for quite a number of the world's best film makers it is an essentially subordinate factor.

It lies in the nature of the film medium that the producer has to deal with social questions on a large and ever expanding scale and plays, for better or worse, an important part in the life of the modern community. The truth of this statement is by no means invalidated by the frequent release of inferior and cheaply escapist films. In their own deplorable way these, too, contribute to the contemporary social scene, to the shaping of ideas, manners and prejudices. It is these social ends and, inextricably interwoven with them, the creative methods by which they are achieved, which matter most. This should be borne in mind when considering the profit motive as it affects the entertainment industry.

Once we have accepted this initial premise, however, we may well concede that the profit motive is a perfectly valid one in the present state of civilization and can indeed be made to serve constructively the greater social ends of the cinema. But it is only part—admittedly, and of necessity, a vitally important part—of the mechanics of film production, as of society itself. But it has no place among the intrinsic objectives of the Film as a creative medium.

Reading through the columns of the film trade press may tempt one to the belief—and perhaps rightly—that the majority of people in charge of film production are concerned only with the pursuit of money as an end in itself, and would as readily market sausages or Scotch whisky as motion pictures, were these two commodities to

provide them with a more lucrative return for their labour. But the rank and file of salesmen in Wardour Street who think like that are no more representative of the whole of our film industry than are obscure and ephemeral little units who, unable to obtain adequate finance themselves, resent those who do, and would like the whole industry to keep to the modest level of unsuccessful mediocrity. In fact, it has been proved all too often in the past that the cinema, if left to the sterile ambitions of middle men, would have fizzled out long ago. Both in this country and in Hollywood, the establishment of a successful film industry may be dated from the moment when the professional profit maker allied himself to the creative artist, and gave him a share in the running of his business. Groups of artists banded together, decided to free themselves from the dictatorship of the existing organizations, and began to market their own films as well as produce them. The "United Artists" Company bears testimony to an early step in this direction. And one can say that the decline of prestige and prosperity of the Hollywood industry started with the abandonment of that practice.

Most conscientious workers in films will repudiate the unethical scramble which disregards every consideration save that of profits. But the dynamic of profit making remains a factor to be squarely faced. A film producer must needs play the go-between, working for a creative compromise between the clamour of sectional interests. This is at once the medium's artistic weakness and commercial strength. You cannot experiment and fail more than once or twice if failure is going to mean a loss of, say, one hundred thousand pounds.

The problem facing the film industry to-day is how to restore the fervour—largely profit inspired—of the early pioneers, yet at the same time temper it with a sense of greater and wider responsibility. This is the problem of maturity. It also serves to explain why the film, unlike painting, music and literature which serve only the aesthetic ends of the creator regardless of conventional moral, ethical or political values, is not an art form and can never hope to attain such a dignity.

Films are a mass medium. The statistics of weekly cinema attendance all over the world are truly staggering. Taking the profit motive for granted, the factors on which a film's quality depends, appear to be twofold: the minds of the people who, it is hoped, will be anxious to see the film and pay for this pleasure, and the minds of the people who make it in order to please both this potential public and—if they have a scrap of self-respect left—themselves.

This simple relation between artist and public offers a striking

demonstration of the profound difference of outlook encountered not only in films but throughout the entertainment industry. For faced with this constant of artist and public, action and re-action, there are those who refuse to take risks, believing that the biggest profits will come their way if they stick to what has proved profitable many times before. (Needless to say, the people who started films were not in that category.) And there are those who, within the same framework of the profit motive, are out for the new and the unexplored, remembering that it was the bold and the unexpected which, time and again, led the way in the field of "big box office" quite as much as "big cinema", and who, indeed, regard this battle-front of the unknown as a magnificent challenge to their creative ability as technicians, as interpreters and as citizens.

It is true that many film makers have, at some time or another,, been infuriated by the apparent success of those who make it their business to pander to the lowest level of public taste. But it is highly doubtful whether these people would not be even more timid under a system replacing the profit motive by other incentives, whether in fact they would not make even greater mischief under the powerful ægis of some all-embracing Ministry or Commissariat, than under the backstairs of the house that profit built. In any case only a poor craftsman, with a shaky faith in the potentialities of his craft, would let the spectacle of cowardice impair his own courage.

Looking through the pages of film history, we shall find time and again that the bold mind of an individual producer utilised the power of the profit motive for greater ends, integrating the making of money with the fulfilment of an idea. From D. W. Griffith's American national epic, "The Birth of a Nation," which, in 1914, opened up new fields of social as well as artistic discovery, to the recent "Best Years of Our Lives," the new has paid good dividends, although at times these had to be waited for with the patience that springs from confidence in a worth while cause. No film company could last on the profits made by isolated "money spinners." It is the long-term profit which singles out the man of vision from the little hole-in-the-corner profiteer, and it is the long-term profit that provides the most convincing justification of the profit motive in our day.

Film history is written by it. Contrary to the prejudice manifested by certain æsthetic circles, the cinema's list of best sellers is full of the names of people who broke new ground rather than of those who blindly submitted to the golden rule. From the lower level of good showmanship—let no-one underrate the contributions of men like Cecil B. de Mille ("King of Kings", "The Plainsman"),

Hitchcock ("Blackmail", "The Lady Vanishes"), Preston Sturgis ("The Lady Eve", "Hail the Conquering Hero")—their list rises to the heights of cinematic achievement, to distinguished directors like King Vidor ("The Citadel", "H. M. Pulham, Esq."), John Ford ("The Informer", "The Grapes of Wrath"), David Lean ("Brief Encounter", "Great Expectations") and—least mortal of them all—Charlie Chaplin.

We must single out Charlie Chaplin in whom all the branches of film production—acting, writing, directing and, last but not least, the finding of the necessary finance—miraculously merged. Comedy has of course always been the most natural meeting ground for art, social comment and box office receipts. In Chaplin's case, obscure one-reel films of his early period in which his touch of genius was only just discernible, soon developed into major works such as "Gold Rush", "City Lights" and "Monsieur Verdoux." And whatever opponents of the profit motive may say about Chaplin and his position in capitalist America, he has been free to make these films—the last of them a costly and savage attack on the institutions of our time which he could never have made under official sponsorship—and he was able to make them because his genius was in key with the mood of his age. The art of one of nature's clowns, a social conscience, and a desire to make money, skilfully blended, wrote the biggest chapter to date in the history of the cinema.

Or take the case of Walt Disney. Ever since he created Mickey Mouse working in a shed, his gift of humour, his ingenuity, his poetic perception have been alert and active. And while university lecturers and the editors of fan magazines chose as their subject the Art of Walt Disney, the accounts of R.K.O. Radio, his distributors, bulged with astronomical figures. The profit motive drove him to build up an industry of his own which was responsible for films like "Fantasia," "Pinocchio," "Saludos Amigos"—and who knows what future triumphs of the imagination.

Some may say: these people were lucky. Their talent lent itself to commercial exploitation. But can the wayward genius prosper in films? Has he not time and again been dampened and tamed by the demands made by the profit motive? Did not Eric von Stroheim fail when he made that outstanding silent film "Greed"? Was not Orson Welles' "Citizen Kane" a flop at the box office because of alleged obscurity, a technique far ahead of his time, an intellectual standard beyond the reach of the average cinema-goer?

Yet it may well be said that these artists in the long run did more for the stability of box office receipts than did the hundreds of small imitators who followed them and fed on the crumbs under

their table. Only they built for the future. They introduced a host of new ideas which, to begin with, startled, shocked and antagonised the public. Looked on as isolated attempts, they failed. But the influence they exerted over the film industry as a whole cannot be over-emphasized. Nor were their efforts, and others like them, always ignored by the men in charge of production.

One of the most enlightened supporters of the profit motive ever to work in the entertainment business was the late Irving Thalberg, for many years in charge of production at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios in Hollywood. A shrewd business man himself, he held out against the opposition of many less broadminded colleagues in insisting on the great value of the "prestige film" to a company. In the 1930's Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer produced, under his guidance, a number of major films not primarily intended to make money but rather to keep the art of films alive, to stimulate other film makers to greater efforts, to keep open the channel of new ideas which alone, he realised, could retain and further the interest of the public in the film medium. Thus "David Copperfield", "Romeo and Juliet", "Captains Courageous", "The Good Earth" are gratefully remembered. They were made to create prestige—and in the process of doing so incidentally grossed millions.

The cinema, being a popular art, must meet the people's demands. But there has always been widespread speculation as to what it is exactly "the public wants", and many artistic crimes have been committed in its name.

Graham Greene once put this very aptly: "It should be the distinction and pride of the film artist that he has a public whose needs have never been met since the closing of the theatres by Cromwell. If you excite your audience first, you can put over what you will of horror, suffering and truth."

It is excitement the public wants, and this is all to the good. Shakespeare who wrote exclusively for the profit motive knew supremely well how to excite his audiences. He made a jostling mob love "Hamlet", and made big profits out of it. Because he had the knack of keeping the people alert, he could easily afford to put over on them the great truths of life and death.

In view of this daily contact between film producers and millions of cinema-goers, it must be the pride as well as the responsibility of the industry to reflect faithfully the changing moods of the time. The intelligent film maker will take care always to keep just one step ahead of his public. He ensures that his work will not be stale by the time it reaches the cinemas, and at the same time discharges his duty to the community. It is not, on the whole, possible for a commercial cinema to move too far ahead of the people,

antagonising them by putting ideas before them which they cannot in any way relate to their own circumstances. But it is even more foolish, and certainly more anti-social, deliberately to lag one step behind, to insult the people by using the lowest denominator common to them—all in the sacred name of profit. At all times must the honest producer remain true to his own conceptions, but the profit motive teaches him the discipline that keeps his teeming ideas within reach, whenever his imagination tends to run away with him.

There is absolutely no reason why the profit motive should not, at times, submit to guidance by a higher authority, in the interest of that long-term prosperity which alone will consolidate its gains, and make it a useful contribution to society. There have been, in the history of the Film, many struggles between the forces of private initiative and of public guidance. One remembers with nausea rather than nostalgia the manner in which big finance entered the British film business between the world wars. After 1918, Britain's industry had completely surrendered to Hollywood. The new financiers hoped to make big profits out of chaos. The Kine-matograph Films Act, passed by Parliament in the late 'twenties, stands out as the first instance on record of a publicly sponsored attempt to guide, but not to control, to protect, but not to violate, the development of British films. The recent agreement on American film exports to Britain, signed by representatives of the American (private) Motion Picture Association, and our own Board of Trade, follows in the direct line of succession. In 1928, for the first time, the private and the national interest were recognised to be part of one another, and great hopes were roused. Alas, the action taken subsequently by some big American companies foiled the good intentions. They sponsored cheap, badly made "British" pictures by the score—"quota quickies", as the trade learnt to call them—which easily defeated the object of the official quota of British films, designed to put the British industry on its feet again. Hundreds of entrepreneurs who cared little for the films and were only concerned to make easy money joined in the fight. Profits, made quickly, vanished even more quickly. Many went bankrupt, and others retired with the proceeds of a few films, leaving a tattered industry to fend for itself. All too few had the vision to plan for continuity. Making the profit motive the sole object of their endeavours, the middlemen succeeded in all but killing it.

But before we go on to the brighter chapter of the second renaissance of British films during the second world war, let us consider for one moment the alternative, offered by some, to set the industry's intricate mechanism in motion: State control. In this

country the State has so far played a benevolent part, giving occasionally advice, aid where necessary, co-ordinating efforts where a clash threatened. In Russia and her sphere of influence, the means of film production have been nationalized. This does not, of course, mean that the profit motive has been eliminated—even the State has to make a profit on its films—but that different motives go to the making of films. The reported dismissal of 240 Czech film employees during the recent putsch in Czechoslovakia because of their alleged “negative attitude” is an illuminating example of what happens under complete State control. While the impetus of the Russian revolution lasted, Russian films were remarkable for their fervour. That impetus has gone, and the deadly routine of the Communist body politic restricts the choice of theme, the methods of working out ideas in terms of film drama so as to make the sponsor all powerful; it is no longer the artist’s power to excite that counts, but his duty to excite the right sentiments for the right people.

What happens to individuals under such a system, especially if their talent is above the average, is a story of sordid and tragic circumstances. Although Russia is not inclined to let us know much about these things, the official reports, smug and brief, tell enough. Eisenstein, perhaps the greatest of the revolutionary film directors, whose “Battleship Potemkin” and “General Line” started a new era in film making, was forced—or chose to—cease film making altogether at frequent intervals in his career, because his way of telling a story was not approved of by committees and councils responsible for running the industry. Parallel developments are discernible in the case of other Russian artists. Moderate composers like Shostakovitch have had to indulge in absurd public apologies for writing in the modern medium, alien to the people’s feelings. In the mania of party bureaucrats are hidden dangers very much worse than those of the misuse of capital. It was the fairest possible compliment to the Western system of film production when, in the ’thirties, Russian directors started to copy the Hollywood technique, to enliven their own films when they had nearly come to a standstill.

During the second world war, British films rose to international fame because a number of men were determined to make films in accord with the mood of the time, and because they were given the opportunity in an atmosphere of creative freedom which has since proved to be most conducive to commercial as well as artistic success. The J. Arthur Rank Organization pioneered in this remarkable experiment, and other executive producers followed suit.

The principle on which they all relied was the small, compact unit, free to choose its men and methods, backed and guaranteed against financial loss by the mother organisation, which sets up sections in charge of studios, equipment and other technical aids. The individual group can afford to tackle occasionally a risky or daring subject, because it works—or should work—on a policy of continuity. Not a continuity of party line, but of an increasingly vigorous appraisal of our world.

Of all the mistrusted subjects which justified expenditure in this way, none has done so more triumphantly than Noel Coward's "In Which We Serve". Before Noel Coward found the finance necessary to make it, know-alls in the industry dismissed the subject as "box office poison" (a word that has always been a handy stand-by for fools). When finance had been secured and the film made, it discredited all gloomy prophets by catching the exact mood of the day. It turned out, over a period of years, to be the biggest money maker of the war, including the overseas market. Other serious films on a variety of subjects have been made to be bracketed with the older subjects of "sex and sadism" as big profit earners. Verse, married love, and other taboo aspects of life and literature, have taken their bow on the screen in recent years.

The one great danger inherent in the profit motive is the everlasting liking of normal men and women for violence and sex, the great preference manifested by the vulgus for the vulgar. It may at times lead producers to give in to the cheap and obvious, and produce "trade cycles", such as the spate of sadistic crime pictures which were dumped on the public in the wake of the war neurosis. But here again the profit motive will guard its own interests, and although a few bad films may get away with it, the public will soon enough find out when this sort of thing has lost its vitality. Always sensitive to the growth and change of public appreciation, the profit motive has grown up.

In the present state of affairs, it seems to me a legitimate driving force. It is a strict master which commands its servants to apply all their minds can give to the problems that move the public of the day. It can be a powerful weapon, for evil in bad hands, for good in benevolent ones. It has given the early fairground entertainment an impetus which must not be allowed to peter out in our more sophisticated—and more expensive—methods of production.

To fight against its abuses is our constant obligation; to extend its potentialities, our privilege.

ROY BOULTING

THE CRIME OF OSCAR WILDE

IT is good to have, even so long as a half century after the events, what must still be regarded as an incomplete account of the three trials of Oscar Wilde.* The learned editor of this important book explains: "For reasons which should appear sufficiently obvious to the reader, I have occasionally considered it desirable to paraphrase witnesses' statements. The comparatively few instances where this has been done are clearly indicated between square brackets in the text."

This compromise is probably as far as we shall ever get, and it must be admitted that the book represents the most complete statement hitherto available to the public on what is to the present generation a mysterious subject. But it would be interesting to know why, since medico-legal works of a serious nature are under our laws permitted the greatest freedom of expression, it has been thought necessary in this essentially medico-legal work to expurgate or bowdlerise just the statements which may well be the most cogent evidence in the cases under consideration. Possibly the book is intended for the "general reader" and not for experts, who are assumed by the law to be less susceptible than ordinary mortals to corruption through the printed word. If this is so, it seems to fall between two stools: there is too much legalism for the ordinary reader and the omission of exact evidence of the pathological aspects of Wilde's case cannot but be unsatisfactory to either legal or medical experts. Hence, although this is far the best treatment of the trials to appear up to now, a still better one will have to be available before a final judgment can be pronounced—that is, if it has not already been pronounced by common sense. It is not uninteresting to note, meanwhile, that the name of the principal figure in these remarkable trials has achieved what good judges regard as an honourable and permanent place in English and European literature; while the names of his detractors, not to mention those of the eminent lawyers in the cases, have faded or are fast fading into that special corner of obscurity reserved for temporarily successful buttresses of a system in which the cement is a hypocritical respectability. Such people hated Oscar Wilde; and he did not love them. He lashed and scarified them in his works, using with superb literary skill and at times genius the weapons with which nature had so generously endowed him: wit, irony, satire and, what is often overlooked, a deeply-rooted and unshakable humanist idealism. Wilde's general

*THE TRIALS OF OSCAR WILDE. Edited with an Introduction by H. Montgomery Hyde. Foreword by The Rt. Hon. Travers Humphreys, P.C. Notable British Trials Series (Hodge and Company, Ltd., 1948).

outlook on life was firmly based on humanism, and we must not forget that it is quite astonishing the rage which others can often feel towards the humanist—a rage based chiefly on fear of “disturbing” and therefore unpalatable ideas. Wilde was a literary artist. No kind of artist is greatly liked by bourgeoisie, but he was a particularly disconcerting and aggressive one towards “stuffed shirts”. He aroused in his enemies first resentment, then rage and in the end a hardly disguised fear which drove them to leave no stone unturned to secure his downfall. If there is one thing which comes out clearly from a perusal of the *Trials*, it is that this “dangerous” man was, as the Americans say, “framed”. The technique of the “smear” was applied by his enemies in a concerted manner, on a grand scale—and effectively. They succeeded in killing him socially in such a way that he never again recovered his old position in life. He was broken financially and died in poverty, though not in absolute discomfort—an obscure French *hôtelier* thought so highly of him that he gave him free board and lodging in those last days when most of his London friends, many of whom had taken advantage of his extreme generosity, abandoned him to starve. The Frenchman was a humanist—the others were not! But Wilde’s spirit has survived them all. Where do they stand now? Who to-day knows or cares anything about Sir Frank Lockwood, Q.C., the Solicitor-General who finally succeeded—through every forensic trick and subterfuge plus the resources of the State and that vast “imponderable”, public prejudice—in getting a jury to give a verdict of “Guilty” which, as W. T. Stead, a famous Liberal journalist, pointed out at the time, brought with it what amounted to a capital sentence? Mr. Justice Wills, the judge who passed sentence, was so affected by the general prejudice and hostility against Wilde that he could not be satisfied to give judgment in the calm, dispassionate way the law demands. “I shall,” he said, “under such circumstances be expected to pass the severest sentence that the law allows. In my judgment it is totally inadequate for such a case as this . . . Hard labour for two years.” There were cries of “Shame!” in Court. Wilde muttered: “And I? May I say nothing, my lord?” On which his lordship merely waved his hand to the warders who then took the prisoner away. There was no appeal in those days. Wilde served the full period of imprisonment and came out a physically broken man—but not spiritually broken, for he wrote the immortal *Ballad of Reading Gaol*; and *De Profundis*, of which the full text is not to be published until 1960.

Wilde had committed—the jury decided—what the law classifies as a misdemeanour, and the misdemeanour of which he was found

guilty was "acts of gross indecency" in private. He was never accused of sodomy, as many people have assumed* from the Press and other reports; or of corrupting youth; or, in fact, of any real crime. Furthermore, the evidence adduced to prove the "acts of gross indecency" in private was of such a nature that on the strength of it a jury in our own times would not hang a leg of mutton. So far as one can read, no trustworthy *proof* of his misdemeanour was ever produced in Court against Wilde—and it is beside the point and gratuitous for lawyers or others to say airily that "without doubt he was guilty". If he were to come up before a London magistrate to-day, the case would either be dismissed or he would be handed over to the psychiatrists. All this can well make one wonder now why there was such a miscarriage of justice. There is an answer. For some time before the trial, there had been a Press campaign against Wilde which, for sheer scurrility and fanaticism against an individual, has never been surpassed and rarely equalled—and the Press was more serious then than it is now! By an outrageous piece of legal jiggery-pokery he was tried jointly with a really bad character named Alfred Taylor and by a truly monstrous outrage of justice—approved by the judge—the prosecution was permitted to proceed against this rascal first, although it was clear to everybody (including Wilde's Counsel, who strongly protested) that to hear Taylor's case first must hopelessly poison Wilde's case—which, in fact, it did. It seems to us in the 1940's perfectly fiendish the way everything was rigged so as to prevent this man from having the slightest loophole to escape punishment. A brief consideration of the trials themselves is therefore necessary before any attempt can be made to assess Wilde's real "crime".

There were three trials: the first, a case for criminal libel brought by Wilde against the Marquess of Queensberry, in which the acquittal of the Marquess prompted a second, a prosecution of Wilde in which the jury disagreed; then came the third and, for Wilde, fatal trial, in which the jury agreed. The facts of the first case are of importance throughout all three, and they are simple enough. Oscar Wilde had developed an intimate ("Greek") friendship with Lord Alfred Douglas, son of the Marquess of Queensberry, who strongly objected and whose objections were flouted in a most provocative manner by Douglas. The situation between father and son quickly grew into a hopelessly bitter family feud without rhyme or reason

*The publishers of THE TRIALS seem to suffer from the same false impression and have inexcusably perpetuated it in their blurb, which reads: "Literary geniuses have appeared in the dock on more than one occasion, but seldom on so serious a charge as that of sodomy"! It is to be hoped that this calumny will be removed in future editions.—C.D.

on either side, or even the elements of common decency such as are observed by less socially exalted people. One day Queensberry called at Wilde's club and left with the hall porter a card on which he had written, "To Oscar Wilde posing as a sodomite". Wilde saw no alternative but to prosecute him for this outrage and accordingly took proceedings for criminal libel. There is every reason to believe that he would have won his case but for two factors which came into the hearing. First, his counsel, Sir Edward Clarke, a prominent leader at the Bar, did not produce Lord Alfred Douglas in the witness-box and at least show up the absurd family feud for what it was worth, and thus reduce one aspect of the case to its proper perspective. That can now be seen to have been a grave error of judgment, but it is hardly comparable with Clarke's next false move which proved to be a blunder and a disastrous one. Edward Carson, counsel for Queensberry, on the third day of the trial unexpectedly announced that he proposed to produce in Court "young men, one after another, who have been in the hands of Mr. Wilde, to tell their tales". The "young men" in question were not merely the most unsavoury types to be found in the lower depths of West End disreputability. They were well-known tricksters and blackmailers who lived entirely by their wits and were ready, granted the circumstances, to swear to anything even though, as in this case, they would become self-confessed accomplices—and therefore involved in the same misdemeanour as Wilde. Why they were thus prepared to risk their skins is another of the inexplicable items of the case—a Crown assurance that they would go free? or the right sort of "persuasion" on the part of Queensberry? Nobody knows to this day! Yet, the moment Carson threatened to produce them, Sir Edward Clarke was seen to leave the Court, and, on his return very soon afterwards, he withdrew the prosecution. Clarke's junior counsel, Charles Willie Mathews, a very experienced criminal lawyer, was for fighting the case to a finish—and quite rightly, as we see now. The editor of the *Trials* comments: "He pointed out that the witnesses whom Carson had indicated his intention of calling were all self-confessed accomplices and themselves criminals whose testimony might well be discredited, and he regarded the case as far from lost." But Sir Edward Clarke's advice prevailed and to this day nobody knows precisely why he acted as he did, though he has gone so far as to say that what he did was "in the best interests of his client"—an altogether enigmatical statement and not an explanation. What exactly happened during that short period when he was out of Court, the world may never know; and speculation seems useless. All we can be sure of is that Lord Alfred Douglas's non-appearance in the witness-box, plus what amounted to a mere

threat and one without any real danger to *Wilde* behind it, won the plea of justification for the Marquess of Queensberry. And this enabled the Crown to proceed against *Wilde* for the "acts of gross indecency" of which he was finally found guilty in the third trial after the Crown case had been badly mauled and the jury disagreed in the second. As regards Sir Edward Clarke's handling of the case, in view of his sincerity, unchallengeable honest and well-known independence of mind, the most charitable way it can now be viewed is that he bungled. If he did not bungle the case, the reasons for his behaviour can assume sinister implications. The consequences of his errors plus the eccentric and often outrageous attitude of Queensberry and Douglas—the latter the real villain of the piece—proved fatal for *Wilde*.

We may now usefully turn from the trials and ask why there was so much venom and prejudice against Oscar *Wilde*, for there seems little doubt that, had they not existed, things would have turned out very differently. We may, incidentally, dismiss altogether the question of his alleged homosexuality: *he was never legally charged with it and no entirely convincing evidence on the subject has ever come from any source worth considering*. He himself denied it before the trials and, however one examines his various statements, one always finds him to be a truthful and consistent man who never hesitated to say what he meant. Even the great and ingenious cross-examiner Edward Carson caught him only once in a "lie"—when *Wilde* said he was 41 years of age when he was 39—and Sir Frank Lockwood, the extremely vindictive prosecutor in the third trial, tried to trip him and failed. All this is not to say that *Wilde* was anything but the oddest and most difficult of men in his conversation and behaviour: a vast poseur, socially irresponsible, a crazy spendthrift and one of those wits who can never miss an opportunity for an epigram or phrase to shock or at least startle his audience. His habits and general behaviour were not those of average, normal men—simply because he was not an average, normal man, being an artist with a touch of genius. As regards his sexual proclivities and tergiversations, even granting homosexuality for the sake of argument (not forgetting that it was never proved) we do well to remember what Lord Dawson of Penn has said of homosexuality that it, "at any rate has one foot in the realm of disease and is not wholly in the realm of crime." The editor of the *Trials* provides in an Appendix an account of "The Prevalence of Male Homosexuality in England" which includes some great names but, more important, shows that in this country it has generally been regarded as something to be hushed up rather than made a fuss of. Writers from Havelock Ellis to Dühren (Bloch) and Raffalovich

and the team of scientific investigators responsible for this year's best seller in the United States—*Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*—have blown sky-high the old ecclesiastical and legal notions on the subject. Why then, if this subject was (and is) usually hushed up in England, was there a campaign of rumour, vindictive accusations and unwarrantable and unprovable tittle-tattle worked up against Wilde of all people, and magnified to astonishing dimensions in the Press and wherever people gossip. To say that the British Press and public—the latter including high society in which homosexuality was not unknown—seriously regarded this man's (alleged) aberrations as challenging to the moral foundations of the Realm, all this now, after over half a century, falls into a perspective in which it looks completely fantastic. The more one studies the "crime" of Oscar Wilde, the more one becomes convinced that his odd sexual life (whatever it may have been, and of which very little is known anyhow) was seized upon by his many enemies as a God-sent excuse to cover their real reasons for prosecuting him and persecuting him until he was finally liquidated. The whole affaire emerges as a strange and cruel conspiracy, a partly conscious and partly unconscious but always concerted attack by the commonplace against the extraordinary—not unlike what happens in the farmyard when a crowing hen appears and is tortured and pecked by "normal" uncrowing hens until she staggers into some shelter and miserably dies from the attacks.

We are thus driven to look outside the trials and the fabricated "crime" to seek for the real crime of which society thought him guilty. First there are his works, and one has not to look very deeply into them to find reasons why society should hate this man. One notes that, in nearly all his works, he is concerned either with evil or some aspect of morality which he thought should be exposed. In the play *An Ideal Husband*, for example, he exposes as the basis for the success of a politician the sale by the latter, when he was young and in a position of trust, of a piece of confidential information by which a financier made a pot of money on the Stock Exchange—and duly rewarded the giver of the information. This play gets close to the bone. In *A Woman of No Importance* the caddish (though not uncommon) behaviour of a noble lord towards a lady he had wronged was shown up. The evil with which Wilde deals is always real enough, and it is usually one more often than not to be found among the ruling class—for Wilde nowhere attacks or ridicules the poor or the humble. Such was the novelty, the freshness, charm and "entertainment value" of the plays when first produced that they were commercially successful. He not only made money from them in his lifetime but they afterwards paid off all

his debts with interest. Just before the trials Wilde was a prosperous author and advancing from success to success—not merely in the money sense, for critics of the stature of Shaw regarded him as a playwright of genius and certainly the best of the theatrically arid nineteenth century. When the first trial opened, Wilde was at the summit of his career. How much literature has lost by his downfall cannot be estimated, but it is safe to say that posterity has lost much. It is, therefore, of special interest to note that although the resentment which culminated in a campaign against Wilde, began to make itself felt a few years before the first trial [1895], the really virulent campaign dated from 1891, in which year his essay, *The Soul of Man under Socialism* appeared in *The Fortnightly* and, when published a year later as a pamphlet, caused a sensation. This coincidence with the appearance of this extremely pungent little work—of an almost entirely political nature though essentially humanist in conception—is so remarkable that the question immediately arises as to whether those humanist *political ideas*, so cogently expressed in this brilliant essay, and not his “homosexuality”, or his “acts of gross indecency”, provide the clue to the real reasons behind the conspiracy against him.

The Soul of Man under Socialism was out of print for some years and was not widely available before it disappeared from the market*. Now that we have all been somewhat educated in the political “isms”, it is well worth re-reading. Wilde’s Socialism, as propounded in this essay, is not the Socialism we know as practised either in Soviet Russia or by our own Labour Government, or by any country to-day which calls itself “Socialist”, or as expounded by orthodox Socialist thinkers. One could hardly expect as much from such an author. We do not read far before discovering that there is something profoundly “anarchist” about Wilde’s political views as here expounded. It may be necessary to explain that the use of the word anarchist here is in the sense acceptable to great Anarchists—Kropotkin, Tolstoi, Bakunin, Proudhon—and such expositors as Eltzbacher or, in later days, Berkman. This Anarchism is essentially humanist and individualistic in its foundations, and so high are the ideals of its “Utopianism” that its most sympathetic critics and opponents dismiss it as utterly impracticable on the grounds that it assumes too much goodness in human nature. Lenin had respect for this Anarchism and seems to have envisaged it as the system which would, after a process of “withering away” of the strong centralised State, replace that State. (Stalin has expurgated Lenin’s views on it from the Soviet political canon.) Bertrand

*Again available (Porcupine Press, 2/6.)

Russell explains its fundamentals in a sympathetic essay in his *Roads to Freedom*. And it was the Englishman William Godwin who, in his great work, *Political Justice* (recently reprinted by the Oxford University Press) gave modern Anarchists their main ideas. The abolition of the power-State and freedom for the individual to live and develop as he pleases are the two central ideas. The Anarchists were the first to foresee what would be the fate of mankind if these ideas are not accepted. Wilde must either have absorbed much of their literature or his intuition was strong and original when he wrote such thoughts as these in his pamphlet:

What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they now are with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worst than the first.

We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, but the best of them are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. Disobedience . . . is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.

A poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious, is probably a real personality and has much in him. No Authoritarian Socialism will do.

All association must be quite voluntary. It is only in voluntary associations that man is fine.

Nothing should be able to harm a man but himself.

Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority.

The world (i.e. society) hates individualism.

All imitation in life and morals is wrong.

The State must give up all idea of government. . . . All modes of government are failures.

Democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people. It has been found out. I must say that it was high time, for all authority is quite degrading.

With authority, punishment will pass away.

The more punishment is inflicted the more crime is produced . . . The less punishment, the less crime.

The State is to be a voluntary association that will organise labour.

It is mentally and morally injurious to man to do anything in which he does not find pleasure.

Whenever a community or a powerful section of the community, or a government of any kind, attempts to dictate to the artist what he is to do, Art either vanishes, or becomes stereotyped, or degenerates into a low and ignoble form of craft.

All these might have been written by Bakunin or by some other Revolutionary Anarchist, and it is not difficult to imagine the feelings of the staid readers of *The Fortnightly* as they read them in their clubs. As regards himself, Wilde hit the nail on the head when he wrote:

The public dislike novelty because they are afraid of it. It represents to them a mode of individualism, an assertion on the part of the artist that he selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses. The public are quite right in their attitude. Art is individualism, and individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value.

Again and again in this waspish, disconcerting essay Wilde attacks authority, the State, the use of force, punishment, and the regimentation of men. One might call him a "revolutionary humanist". Looking back on those spacious days and comparing them with our own age, and the present state of the world, few people now would be capable of working up any great indignation about these ideas of Wilde—excepting, of course, the extreme authoritarians: the Catholic Church, the Stalinist-Communists, the Nazis and the Fascists. His attack on the popular Press was never forgiven by it. Indeed, there are few institutions he did not attack in his own inimitable and stinging way. Take this: "To the wickedness of the Papacy humanity owes much. The goodness of the Papacy owes a terrible debt to humanity . . . The good Popes hated thought. . . . There is danger in Popes". And: "All the results of the mistakes of governments are quite admirable." And: "Individualism . . . knows that people are good when they are left alone."

Such sentiments as those culled above from this one essay and delightfully expounded by epigram and repartee in the plays, or used to colour his stories and essays, must have been anathema to everybody who based their philosophy of life on authoritarian religion, power, government and "law and order" based on force. Had Wilde been an obscure person struggling to propagate unpopular ideas, England would have dealt with him in her usual quiet way. But he was the most prominent dramatist of his day, and his writings had made his name known not only from Land's End to John O'Groats but widely on the Continent of Europe. He was going

from strength to strength and, if he was capable of so revolutionary a political tract as *The Soul of Man under Socialism*—a crime against the holy ghost, because Wilde was a man of good family and he and his wife had been accepted in “high” society—what might not this awful Irishman do next? From the point of view of all those who held to the old order of things—now being challenged from many other directions—the sooner this dangerous writer could be put out of the way the better. He was a standing danger, a challenge to all they held dear. This was Wilde’s real crime. The man’s own “silly” behaviour provided authority with a starting-point from which it was not difficult to work up a campaign against him.

Yet we must not avoid facing the truth that, important as these *Trials* are for an understanding of Wilde’s fate, they are not so important in this sense as a reading of his works and an understanding of the political and social background of his day. It is these which provide the most trustworthy clues about the real “crime” of Oscar Wilde. The full story has yet to be written—if it can ever be written, which seems doubtful. Nobody to-day bothers about his alleged homosexuality or about those “acts of gross indecency” of which so much fuss was made: they are matters for the psycho-pathologists and may well be left to them. After many years during which his name was missing, having been erased from the “distinction board” at Portora Royal School in Ireland where he was educated, it has been restored. The authorities of his old school took the same view as the rest of the world after the trials. Time has had its effect. Guilty or not guilty of the misdemeanour for which he was tried, the punishment he suffered deprived English literature of a writer who promised great things, of a humanist who might have helped humanity. The punishment was too great. The publication now of the *Trials* proves this beyond doubt. Some readers of the three cases may come to the conclusion that, if any crime was committed, it was committed not by Wilde but by the Authority which he pilloried.

CHARLES DUFF

RETURN TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

PROTESTANT Christian apologists have changed their ground. Not many of them now present the evidence for Christian beliefs and seek to defend them in detail against the scepticism induced by the development of science. The severe losses and many withdrawals on this front have made the positions untenable, and those who continue to hold on, the liberals and modernists, are only able to do so by fraternizing with the enemy, and are virtually lost to the Christian cause. It is possible for Christians to abandon these positions and to try other tactics: it is possible for them to say that the arguments of rationalists against the credibility of this or that belief or the probability of this or that happening are irrelevant, that the physics or metaphysics of the Incarnation or the Resurrection, on the assumptions of their faith, are not matters on which they have any reason to be able to give satisfactory answers, that they hold their convictions on other grounds and will not therefore attempt to defend them on this ground. Thus avoiding engagement on ground of the rationalist's choosing, they boldly take their stand on the Christian faith and deploy the content of the Biblical conception of human nature and destiny to convince the reason and convict the conscience of modern man, so that he is prepared to believe that the Christian gospel is the only answer to his condition. Setting aside the question of its truth, they set out to show that the Christian faith is highly relevant to-day, so relevant that history is presumptive evidence of its truth.

Many recent works of Protestant theologians might be cited in evidence of this tendency. Outstanding are the two volumes of Reinhold Niebuhr's Gifford Lectures, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. This re-statement of the content and relevance of the Christian faith may be taken as normative for the Protestant view. Its treatment of the pretensions of the Church makes it definitively Protestant. It is normative because Niebuhr skilfully uses the main variant developments in theology and in secular thought to recover the distinctly Biblical conception of human nature and destiny, and shows its perpetual relevance by using it as a clue to historical interpretation and to the achievement of a modern synthesis. Thus it is neither eclectic nor branded with the name of a school, but stands forth as a powerful hypothesis claiming to do justice to all the facts. For this reason, and because Niebuhr tries to take nature and history seriously, his re-statement of Christian faith is worth the reconsideration of humanists.

Niebuhr fully accepts the Renaissance discovery that history is filled with endless possibilities of good and evil open to man, a

discovery which sets the themes and tasks of history and gives it prospects and seriousness. He notes the characteristic humanist assumption that they are possibilities of good and that they can be realized. He is concerned to show that they are also possibilities of evil, and that the good cannot be fully nor finally realized. All achievements are new occasions of evil because man's nature and condition make it inevitable that he shall will good and do evil. The good and evil in him are not separable principles, as the Greeks thought: body and spirit, or reason and appetite. Evil is essentially spiritual, but both reason and the vital impulses are ambivalent, sometimes creative, sometimes destructive; and their creative phases involve destruction. The good and evil flow from man's nature and condition. He is a finite self, but he transcends himself and reflects upon his own deed and judges it. Such judgments may inform his will but cannot control his acts. Not because vital urges (his body) are too strong or run too deep for rational restraint, but because of the predicament of his situation. As a finite self he is necessarily anxious for his own survival and security, and his rational nature makes him anxious, resourceful, and persistent far beyond the survival impulse of animals. His anxiety prompts him to seek advantage and to secure the future, both in dealing with nature and with his fellows; and in the nature of the case, anxiety is unlimited and security never assured: the further he goes in trying to make himself secure, the further he has to go, because he gives himself more to lose and both tempts and threatens, and perhaps injures, others in the same case as himself. If this logic of anxious self-frustration inherent in the human situation is not always clearly discernible in the life of the individual, it is plain enough in the policies of the collective organizations with which he is insured against his anxieties. The lust for power, the exploitation of nature and of men, give general evidence of this condition. They are endemic amongst human beings in this world; there will be no lack of prescriptions, but there can be no cure, even if mankind perfected their institutions and universalized goodwill. History cannot solve its own problem. And the evil that men inevitably do, individually and collectively, is almost inextricably mixed and confused with moral pretensions and rationalizations, so that it does not seem to be what it is. Thus man's will is determined, in spite of himself (by his situation), to do evil, and his responsibility and sin are less in his individual acts than in his condition. His sin is original sin. It is the sin of trying in his condition, out of his own resources, to complete his life and achieve his good. This course inevitably bogs him more deeply and desperately in evil. The only cure for his anxiety, which expresses

his true situation and which prompts him to do evil, is trust in God. That gives him the only genuine security he can achieve, exempts him from the inescapable pressure of the human situation, remakes him on a new model; he is released and enabled in principle to do good; sin is overcome in him in principle, although not in fact: he is justified by faith.

This is the Biblical conception of man's nature and condition, recovered and reaffirmed at the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant concentration on the Pauline version of the human predicament (Romans 7, 15-24) and the Christian deliverance from it by faith slighted the possibilities of secular progress on which the Renaissance concentrated. Niebuhr is concerned to correct the emphasis of both by recovering the Biblical warrant and interpretation for the Renaissance view.

One of the tasks which confronts us in re-assessing the human situation to-day is to reject what is false and to accept what is true in the Renaissance world view. Human history is indeed filled with *endless possibilities*; and the Renaissance saw this more clearly than either classicism, Catholicism or the Reformation. But it did not recognize that history is filled with endless possibilities of *good and evil*. It believed that the cumulations of knowledge and the extensions of reason, the progressive conquest of nature and (in its later developments) the technical extension of social cohesion, all of which inhere in the "progress" of history, were guarantees of the gradual conquest of chaos and evil by the forces of reason and order. It did not recognize that every new human potency may be an instrument of chaos as well as of order; and that history, therefore, has no solution of its own problem.

This tragic aspect of history, towards which the Renaissance was partly oblivious, was precisely the aspect of history which the Reformation most fully comprehended. This comprehension is contained in the Reformation polemic against all doctrines of sanctification, whether Catholic, secular or sectarian-Christian, in which it detects a too-simple confidence in historical possibilities. Its doctrine of "justification by faith" contains implications for an adequate interpretation of history which have never been fully appropriated and exploited, probably because most Protestant theologies which are interested in the historical problem have drawn their inspiration from the Renaissance rather than from the Reformation.

It must be noted, however, that the understanding of the Reformation for the ultimate problem of historic existence was

not (and probably could not be) elaborated without tendencies toward moral and cultural defeatism. Its consciousness of the ultimate frustration which faces every human enterprise inclined it towards indifference when dealing with all the proximate problems. When confronting these problems every moral situation, whether individual or collective, actually discloses, when fully analysed, unending possibilities of higher fulfilment. There is no limit to either sanctification in individual life, or social perfection in collective life, or to the discovery of truth in cultural life; except, of course, the one limit, that there will be some corruption, as well as deficiency, of virtue and truth on the new level of achievement.

This moral pessimism and cultural indifferentism of the Reformation was one cause of its defeat by the forces of the Renaissance. It must be recognized that the spiritual life of modernity has been primarily determined by this defeat. The other was that the phenomenal development of all the sciences and social techniques, of the conquest of nature and the general extension of human capacities in the modern period, was bound to emphasize what was true, and to hide what was false, in the Renaissance estimate of life. . . . It is particularly important to understand why and how those aspects of the truth about human nature and destiny, in which the Renaissance and the Reformation contradict one another, represent valuable insights into human nature and history, which are partially blunted and obscured in the mediaeval synthesis in which both were contained. The question is whether they can be so conceived and defined that they will not contradict or tend to defeat each other. If this were possible a philosophy of human nature and destiny could emerge which would reach farther into the heights and depths of life than the mediaeval synthesis; and would yet be immune to the alternate moods of pessimism and optimism, of cynicism and of sentimentality, to which modern culture is now so prone. (Vol. II, p. 160.)

History is a divine imperative, serious, purposive, and progressive, as the Jewish prophets believed. (Niebuhr insists that progress is a Biblical conception.) But the meaning of Christianity is that no consummation is to be looked for within history, and only those who live out of the world can live in it to any purpose. Christians, accepting the witness of Christ, obediently trusting to God for their existence, can give themselves to the achievement and establishment in the world of truth and justice, never ceasing

to disavow "every effort and pretension to complete life, whether in collective or individual terms, every desire to stand beyond the contradictions of history, or to eliminate the final corruptions of history." The achievements of Christians in history on these lines are real and progressive, and bring the world nearer to the perfection which can never be finally attained within history because of the nature of man. Those who reject the Christian faith may also participate in this process; but because they have not the inner security of trust in the divine love, they are under the determination of the human predicament and cannot do the good they will; and because they pretend to be able to interpret and complete life out of human resources, they are doomed to perpetual disillusionment and an ultimate futility. Disinterested Christian love, which is the leaven of the world and creates new possibilities of human achievement within history, cannot be sustained unrequited except on the assumptions of the Christian faith, which thus enables men to act in a way that transcends historical conditions and historical judgments and is only justified beyond history. Christians may, and are morally bound to, take sides in history according to their judgment of the better or worse cause, although they do so without pretensions and illusions; but the divine love, as the Jewish prophets learned to see, cannot champion any human cause, even that of the faithful, can only appear in history as the sufferer on the cross; beyond history, as the judge. Thus both divine and Christian love produce results in history but have their full scope and consummation beyond history. Human nature is limited by but may transcend history because human destiny does transcend history.

Of course this is an old story and it is not open to Niebuhr to introduce into it anything new which demands attention. Long enough ago Pascal elaborated a cry of reflective despair at the human predicament, since re-echoed by Kierkegaard and still reverberating; their backward leap into the Christian faith to escape the abyss of nihilism at their feet is more than ever possible to-day. That is why Niebuhr's restatement of the faith, highly competent and mature, familiar with, and not indifferent to, the achievements of secular culture as well as the ramification of theology, merits reconsideration from a humanist point of view. He and other Christian thinkers are to-day saying to humanists in effect: Think again now, at this moment of history, in the context of modern experience and ask yourselves whether the inescapable recognition of the impossibility of ultimate human achievement in the pursuit of truth or of justice does not break the spring of humanism and leave the field of history to the Christians: is there not more

relevance and validity than you had dreamed of in the Christian doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, incarnation, atonement, resurrection, and judgment? And if relevant and philosophically apt, may they not be credible and verifiable?

There are periods of hope in history in which the Christian faith would seem to be irrelevant, because history itself seems to offer both the judgment and the redemption which the Christian faith finds in the God who has been revealed in Christ. There are other periods of disillusionment when the vanity of such hopes is fully revealed. We have lived through such centuries of hope and we are now in such a period of disillusionment. The centuries of historical hope have well nigh destroyed the Christian faith as a potent force in modern culture and civilization. We do not maintain that the period of disillusionment in which we now find ourselves will necessarily restore the Christian faith. It has merely re-established its relevance. There is always the alternative of despair, the "sorrow of the world", to the creative despair which induces a new faith. (Vol. II., p. 212).

II

The humanist does not, indeed cannot, hide his wounds. Wells and Russell have expressed their despair. The Christian is in a superior position and can say, I told you so. Niebuhr is very nice about it and points out the good reason there seemed to be for secular optimism. But the point of his argument which is intended to hurt is in the restatement of the doctrine of original sin; it is a doctrine which humanists have always found peculiarly fantastic and irritating, but perhaps in their present mood they will have the patience to see what it means and to what conclusion it leads. Niebuhr's account of human nature and of the human condition, for all the points of difference, is strikingly like that of Hobbes, the earliest naturalistic English thinker. Their conclusions of course are different. Hobbes finds the security which makes justice possible (and rational) in the Great Society, Niebuhr in the Kingdom of God beyond the world. The reason Niebuhr finds in the Great Society, or any other human improvement, no solution of the problem is that it merely reproduces in a new form or a new context the ineradicable evil. The moral of all history is, "new presbyter is but old priest writ large." Similarly every new philosophy which claims to be true is doomed to be superseded like the others. How, then, on humanist assumptions can there be anything but scepticism and cynicism, except blind illusion?

The answer which humanists usually give will not do: that in bad times the black side of human nature is painfully conspicuous and colours the view; that the bright side concealed by the times will again have its day; that nature "red in tooth and claw" is also the scene of mutual aid; that egoism is balanced by altruism in the human make-up. It was in principle this answer, skilfully elaborated with subtlety and insight, which the Christian Bishop Butler gave to the naturalistic Hobbes. But the argument does not touch the position to which it is opposed: that human beings willy-nilly, good and bad, act under the constraint of their human situation; that the human predicament compels all to assert themselves, in the first place in order to live, in the second place in order to live well; that this situation can be aggravated but cannot be abrogated. The conclusion which Hobbes drew is that morality is only rational and possible if political power can give assurance that it will be enforced on all: in that case, a common interest is created and the initial situation is virtually abrogated. Niebuhr agrees that institutions can make the situation more favourable to the possibility of human goodness, but insists that it can only be virtually abrogated by trust in God.

Undoubtedly humanist psychology and ethics in the past have over-simplified the problem, have assumed too lightly a natural harmony of selfish and benevolent principles in the structure of human nature, of a natural coincidence of private interest and public interest in the social order. Any reading of human nature is inadequate which confines attention to an inventory of innate propensities and abilities, or to the physiological and psychological structure and functions of personality, or to the situations in which human nature manifests behaviour. All such matters are inseparably related in the total human complex, and are in constant interaction and reciprocally influence and change each other. It may be possible and fruitful to isolate for theoretic analysis constant elements in human nature, but these are known only in behaviour which is profoundly modified both by the situations created by social institutions and by concepts, ideals, aims, purposes, occasions, and tasks furnished by patterns of culture: and these are indefinitely modifiable by policies. That is to say, the actual content of human interests is variable and modifiable, and also there is no obvious limit to the possibilities of social method by which interests may be reconciled, harmonized, or identified. Indeed, it is true to say that there is no determinate human nature and no determinate human situation; these are misleading abstractions, distracting attention from the real concrete cultural and social phenomena in history. Human nature and the human situation do not together determine

history, nor does history determine human nature and the human situation. It is not so simple as that: the determination is reciprocal, or dialectical. There emerges a possibility of self-conscious human freedom, through understanding control of the process. This freedom is a clear aim, conscious selection from alternative possibilities, not mere self-identification with a natural historical process recognized as inevitable. Such freedom is both collective and personal, and an understanding of the precise relation of interdependence of the two is of crucial importance for the characteristic disputes and problems of our time. A grand strategy of human advance on many fronts is conceivable and would be likely to produce remarkable results. The situation is far more complex (the inter-related factors more variable and reacting together more intimately and powerfully) than has been generally recognised, and the possibilities and the difficulties far greater. The humanist who is aware of this can be neither defeatist nor sanguine; he is both disillusioned and immensely stimulated. His philosophy of human nature and destiny does "reach. . . into the heights and depths of life," and is "immune to the alternate moods of pessimism and optimism, of cynicism and sentimentality, to which modern culture is now so prone."

Therefore, humanists who have put away fatuous beliefs in a golden age of the past and in utopias of the present or the future (and many have not), who do not see much that is black or white in the human spectacle, who agree with Joubert, "*Il ne peut y avoir de bon temps à venir que celui qui ressemblera aux bons temps passés*", and "*Demander la nature humaine infaillible, incorruptible, c'est demander du vent qui n'ait point de mobilité*": whose humanism is seasoned and mature, that is, will reject Niebuhr's reformulation of the doctrine of original sin as itself too simple for the facts, as nothing but the other side of the medal which has been put away with childish things. There is no fatality in the structure of human nature in its relation to the human situation which puts a blight on human hopes, unless those hopes are so foolish as to look for "*la nature humaine infaillible, incorruptible*."

It is with this last point that we can begin to develop the decisive difference between Christians and humanists, cutting out all mere debating points. Both Christians and humanists (unless they are simple-minded or fanatical, as some are) recognize that human nature neither is nor can be made in time (even with the endless possibilities of improvement before it) infallible and incorruptible. Christians cannot bear the prospect, and the Christian faith is their answer. Humanists (some, at least) accept the conditions of human living as they find them and found their hopes, conceptions, and

ideals on what seems to be possible. The ultimate failure to eliminate evil and error does not worry them at all, because: (1) the difference between better and worse is so enormous as to give them all the incentive and occupation they need; (2) the achievements are real and have a finality and individual quality which informs judgments and ideals, rather than is subject to them; ideals have no secure superiority, owe much to the actual, and are frequently surpassed by the actual; (3) the final elimination of evil and error simply does not mean anything, it is a wind that does not blow.

I will apply this analysis of the issue to Niebuhr's treatment of the historical enterprise, characterised by him as the cultural quest for truth and the social quest for justice and love. He accepts Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge in *Ideology and Utopia*. Mannheim accepts the substance of the Marxist critique of culture: summarily, the view that culture is necessarily concerned with the elaboration, development, and defence of a set of interests rooted in the politico-economic structure of society. But Mannheim will not allow that Marxism is an exception, and he applies the critique to its pretensions to universality: this also is an "ideology". The argument runs thus: whatever your interests, they are your interests as a political person; but the fact that you have this or that set of interests implies also that you must do this or that to realize them, and that you must know the specific position you occupy in the whole social process; this is the deeper logic and dynamic of human thinking, but since this structural relationship between the conditioning point of view and particular judgments can be taught, the point of view can be transcended by recognition of its limitation, no universality or absolute status is assumed or demanded for it, and therefore particular judgments can be qualified from points of view representing other interests accepted as equally entitled to historical existence and destiny. Thus Mannheim indicates an historical (as distinct from abstract or metaphysical) universality and freedom for human thinking, to be achieved by an adequate sociology of knowledge, which does not impair the dynamics of thought and progress: the ship is taken skilfully through the narrow and dangerous waters between scepticism and fanaticism.

It is characteristic of Niebuhr that he chooses to accept Mannheim's account of human thinking as 'embodied', having a given locus and dynamic, a position in society and a set of interests to be maintained and developed. He explicitly criticizes and rejects Greek rationalism and philosophical idealism, and these elements in Christian thought, which assume in human nature a pure reason

which by disciplines may free itself of finite conditions and gain cognition of absolute truth. He is even more scathing in his criticism and rejection of Dewey's empiricist's faith in co-operative inquiry as a means of establishing a universal human order, because he thinks that Dewey too simply assumes the unconditioned universality of "scientific method" and has no adequate "sociology of knowledge". But it is equally characteristic of him that he chooses to reject Mannheim's conclusion, his indication of the historical conditions of universality and freedom in human thinking. He taxes Mannheim with seeking (in vain) to escape the logic of his own analysis. If the analysis delivers the reader from fanaticism, it is only because it leads to scepticism and breaks the historical spring of the cultural enterprise. Only the Christian pilot can take the ship out. Men as finite selves are bound to take partial views, and as transcending their condition they are bound either to claim universal truth for their partial views or to recognize their partiality and give up the quest for truth. This, of course, is descriptively true of what frequently happens, but that is not at all to say that it is a dilemma in which human life is shut up. Mannheim's way out to historical freedom and universality is in principle open and true to experience. His sociology of knowledge is not a complete account of human thinking and the status of knowledge, a complete epistemology, but the argument so far as it goes is permanently valid. Since Niebuhr has chosen to accept it, the humanist can be quite ready to agree to this account of the matter. But he insists on the essential conclusion: that historically conditioned human thinking, by recognition of all its conditions and presuppositions, by taking full account of alternatives, above all by being relied on, used, and lived by, can transcend historical conditions without losing the dynamic inherent in those conditions which make achievement and progress; that human thinking on these conditions is a self-correcting and self-completing process.

Niebuhr is not interested in this conclusion not merely because it is not the Christian conclusion but fundamentally because although he rejects Greek rationalism and philosophical idealism and accepts a descriptive sociological account of human knowledge, he retains the ideal notion of truth as disembodied, pure, universal, eternal. He is not really seeing through the pretensions of both sides and reconciling the truth in them through the mediation of the relevant Biblical conceptions. He comes from the idealist camp, in spite of his disclaimers, and is found in the other camp solely for the sake of the idealist cause. What he sees is the incapacity of men to achieve on the historical plane the truth they seek; but it is the idealist conception of truth he has in mind, and

he does not stop to criticize it, nor to consider the humanist conception of truth. He does not face the possibility that this truth which is not achieved in history is an unmeaning abstraction. Of course philosophical idealism is important; and there are normative universal abstract truths which are outside history, so to speak, because they do not wait on further experience although they are the fruit of experience and are only relevant to human life. But such truths are attainable, are indeed commonplace, although perpetually forgotten or ignored. Any other sense of absolute truth and secure possession of it seems to imply not merely conditions of life which do not happen to obtain, but conditions of life purely rational, immaterial, and eternal, that is to say, purely universal. If it is assumed that such conditions of life, although not obtainable in history, are conceivable and ideal, in the sense of interesting and desirable, humanists are at least entitled to object that this belongs to the metaphysical realm of pure possibility and is not required for the interpretation of history or participation in it. I would go further and say that not only such conditions have no bearing on human life and are strictly inconceivable and meaningless, but that in so far as meaning is found in them they indicate conditions of life which do not stand above but fall below the historical conditions of human life; just as "un vent qui n'ait point de mobilité" does not really excel the real thing, neither does "une nature humaine infaillible, incorruptible". This is not a piece of bravado, a defiant extravagance; it is a profound meditation, and he who does not understand it does not catch the full seriousness of humanism. It is the imagined ideal that is shallow. In the history of thought as in the history of the individual soul, true perceptions and typical errors constantly recur but in both there is growth and may be progress; and the content and term of that process in the life of the individual and in the history of the race is never absolute truth and infallible mind, but reliable knowledge fruitfully applied to the creation of experience. In this concrete context of actual living, knowledge may be relevant and sufficient, and cannot be more than this in heaven or earth. The humanist who understands these things does not fall into scepticism nor make absurd claims for his knowledge, nor need recourse to Christian doctrines to reconcile nonsensical notions of truth with historical possibilities. At the same time he need not grudge others the comfort of being sustained in arduous labours by the feeling that they are saying the last word: nor neglect to profit by their real achievements because these are not exactly what they are claimed to be.

Niebuhr's account of the historical attempt to establish justice

and love follows the same lines and is open to the same criticism. He sees the political struggles within nations and between nations, overt and concealed; he appreciates the construction of stable policies and wider structures of political cohesion; he recognizes that there can be no final historical achievement in which oppression is eliminated and conflict resolved. This ultimate frustration, he concludes, can only breed despair in those who will recognize it, without the Christian faith in a consummation of history beyond history, in other than human hands. Within history, the realization of mutual love is possible, although it is difficult because the manifestation of love risks the failure to elicit response and may merely make a victim; but sacrificial love which looks for no response and gets none is on historical conditions both impossible and irrational: it can only be sustained by divine intervention and example and on extra-historical conditions. To be fair, one must consider exactly what he says.

Sacrificial love transcends history . . it cannot justify itself in history. from the standpoint of history mutual love is the highest good. Only in mutual love, in which the concern of one person for the interests of another prompts and elicits a reciprocal affection, are the social demands of historical existence satisfied. All claims within the general field of interests must be proportionately satisfied and related to each other harmoniously. The sacrifice of the self for others is therefore a violation of natural standards of morals, as limited by historical existence.

Furthermore the sacrifice of self-interest in psychologically impossible when life is conceived only in terms of nature-history. If the self identifies life with physical existence the basic ethical paradox of the gospel ethic, Whosoever loseth his life shall find it, can have no meaning. This paradox can have meaning only if the dimension of life is known to transcend historical existence . . . Sacrificial love thus represents a tangent towards "eternity" in the field of historical ethics. It is nevertheless the support of all historical ethics; for the self cannot achieve relations of mutual and reciprocal affection with others if its actions are dominated by the fear that they may not be reciprocated. Mutuality is not a possible achievement if it is made the intention and goal of any action. Sacrificial love is thus paradoxically related to mutual love; and this relation is an ethical counterpart of the general relation of super-history to history. . . . The final majesty, the ultimate freedom, and the perfect disinterestedness of the divine love

can have a counterpart in history only in a life which ends tragically, because it refuses to participate in the claims and counter-claims of historical existence. It portrays a love "which seeketh not its own". . . even the most perfectly balanced system of justice in history is a balance of competing wills and interests, and must therefore worst anyone who does not participate in the balance . . . It is impossible to symbolize the divine goodness in history in any other way than by complete powerlessness, or rather by a consistent refusal to use power in the rivalries of history. (Vol. II, p. 71.)

Here Niebuhr confuses justice and love and perversely exalts sacrificial love over mutual love. The passage is characteristic in that it shows how quick he is to seize the essential point in humanist thought and how he lets it go again, how discerning he is and how the preconceptions of orthodox Christian thought blur the meaning of what he sees. Thus he rightly sees that in the humanist view self-sacrifice is an evil, a violation of morals; and more faintly he seems to see why, because it indicates the failure to realize a richer complex of good: yet he makes of historical heroic human remedies applied to redeem such failures a transcendent principle, irrational, sublime, and superior to successful normal historical realizations of love—which is to defeat the whole intent of historical sacrificial love and make nonsense of it. Sacrificial love cannot be a historical norm (true insight); therefore it is a super-historical norm (*non sequitur*, but orthodox Christian teaching). "There is . . . no pure ethical norm in history; nor any hope of history gradually purifying itself so that it will achieve this norm. The "essential", the normative man, is thus a "God-man" whose sacrificial love seeks conformity with, and finds justification in, the divine and eternal agape, the ultimate and final harmony of life with life" (Vol. II, p. 84). Self-sacrifice is often called for in human life, and occurs on a considerable scale (even in conditions which make it "psychologically impossible"); it is far more exacting than the sacrifice sustained by reciprocated love, and may be more admirable; but it is only admirable when it is strictly "historical", when it is a turning aside from strong interests and pursuits to help another, or a refraining from a particular pursuit for the sake of another; when it is professional self-sacrifice, so to speak, self-sacrifice as a vocation and on principle, when you set out to have no interests, pursuits, and life of your own because you believe that human beings have a divine calling to live that way, then such "super-historical" self-sacrifice is apt to be most mischievous, and Christian teaching

has often engendered it with ruinous consequences: of course there may be a considered life-long setting aside of personal interests and pursuits in a specific course chosen because of the state of the world, but this is historical sacrificial love nourished by historical hopes and sustained by historical effects; it is exceptional and has no meaning except by reference to a life of positive worth-while interests and to the achievement of a state of the world in which it would be unnecessary and wrong. The content of love is historical, viz, real interests, real pursuits, real achievements, real goods. Mutual love is explicitly concerned with this content, and so is sacrificial love within history. But make sacrificial love a principle and a norm superseding or outdoing mutual love and you empty it of all historical content. As with absolute truth, that is not to put it in heaven but in limbo, incapable of any content or meaning. Of course interests and pursuits, the historical content of human lives and personalities, are ambiguous; they may be producers or consumers, so to speak, they may be making claims or creating goods: inevitably they are doing both to some extent, and with infinitely various shades of difference, and it is in this theatre that the subtle interplay of altruism and egoism takes place; to abstract and hypostasize one principle, or a particular manifestation of one principle, and create a new world out of it is sheer fantasy, and hopeless falsification. In any case, the divine love manifested in Christ (for the sake of argument) is not sacrificial; it is accomplishing the divine will and fulfilling the divine interest. It is the supreme example, in which the difference between egoism and altruism vanishes: God is good and it is his interest to will the true interest of man; but the true interest of man is God's conception and God's interest; it is only saved from odious comparison with painfully familiar cases of altero-centric egoism in family relationships by being put above suspicion and outside human judgment: nevertheless the difficulty is real enough to have occasioned tensions in theological thought and to have left its mark on orthodox doctrine. The point is that the divine example is a special and difficult case which is neither like sacrificial love in history nor a justification of sacrificial love as an absolute ideal. It is mere Christian bias to say "the divine love can have a counterpart in history only in the life which ends tragically, because it refuses to participate in the claims and counterclaims of historical existence." The tragic end is merely accidental and irrelevant and the refusal to participate in the claims and counter-claims of historical existence (sacrificial love) is merely one mode of creative living, not the specifically divine. Devotion to the care of the broken and helpless, the weak and

oppressed, is one half of goodness, and the other half which makes sense of it is participation in the creative and regulative tasks of historical existence, cultural and social. If one must speak of the divine, let it be found not less manifest in the promethean culture heroes than in the sacrificial figures. Deification of the one type by Christians leads to the exaltation of the other type by humanists, to the extravagances of Nietzsche, for example, who, it is important to notice, reacts violently against Christianity just because he is a profound and subtle mind, not because he is not. Fortunately the mass of mankind are incapable of taking Christianity seriously, and treat it as equivalent to compassion (of which they approve) and get on with the day's work. But the joining of these two aspects of human living is too important to be left entirely to casual common sense. Indeed Niebuhr from the Christian side is making a sustained and critical attempt to effect just this synthesis, but in spite of himself he fails to take seriously enough the tasks and content of historical existence and subordinates them (in spite of his remarkable insight) to the sacrificial historical element translated and transfigured in the Christian manner.

Apart from his Christian preconceptions, or bound up with them, is his horror of the element of egoism, self-assertion, aggressiveness, inseparable from cultural and political enterprises in historical existence. That is the essence of his doctrine of original sin, his insistence on its perpetual relevance, and his warning to this secular age of the folly of the humanist hope. That is why the divine is precluded from participation in the specifically human historical tasks and identified in history with renunciation of the world and sacrificial love. That is why the divine consummation of history is outside history. Freudian psychologists have insisted on the powerful influence in our lives of repressed aggressiveness; some are wrecked by the struggle, many or most of us have feelings of anxiety and guilt which give rise to the longing for a state of pure love. The Christian scheme of salvation obviously applies to this condition and has therapeutic value, but whether it is the best therapeutic treatment and has sound results is quite another question. Marxist or other utopianism which believes in a historical consummation either existing somewhere or coming sometime also gives ideal relief to this condition and is a source of justification. The conception of a super-historical state of pure sacrificial love is an abstract notion without meaning; the conception of an historical state of pure mutual love has some meaning. Neither conception is mature. The achieved stabilities and harmonies of human interest are in the nature of things not permanent, and whilst they last have perpetually to be re-enacted

and repossessed; and the vitality and renewal which make them final and good are inseparable from aggressiveness, change, and death. You cannot be pious about the fairest flowers of human living, and be impious about the conditions in which they are rooted. Death and aggressiveness are sacred as well as love, or for the sake of love. It is fatal not to take them seriously, or to seek to disguise or abolish them: they are essential to freedom and creative vitality in heaven as elsewhere. History does not wait for a consummation to which all things move and for the sake of which they exist and in which they are justified: the finalities of history (and of nature) are always present; although the possibilities are always more. There is indeed a love "which seeketh not its own", but that love does not make all forms of seeking one's own reprehensible; there is no other foothold in history, no other witness to the reality of living and of the good; no other means of creating the content of existence. Let one seek one's own, in the sense of having real interests and building up real achievements, with due regard to the interests of others and with use and enjoyment of their achievements. This normal pattern of modern secular living is delusively simple, but it is none the less not infrequently realized, and sustained by success. The hopes of humanists, too often extravagant and absurd, are exciting enough for moderate and mature minds even when bound to the feasible.

Niebuhr's synthesis, then, falls apart, because it is impossible to unite Christian and humanist views: they are developed alternatives, contradictions which never can be reconciled if both are taken seriously. The very earnestness and acumen of his attempt to take history and nature seriously shows the impossibility, for he cannot succeed in taking them as seriously as the humanist does and he fails to measure the strength and resources which the humanist gains from his position. He does not even succeed in establishing a distinctively Christian position which must be respected even by those who cannot share it, for he falls into just those Christian positions which from a quasi-humanist standpoint he undermines. He rejects Greek and modern philosophical idealism and that tradition in Christian theology, yet he retains uncritically an idealist notion of truth; he rejects Christian and other mysticism, yet in effect he shatters all the categories and meanings of human historical existence and looks for another life on unthinkable super-historical conditions of undifferentiable oneness; his notions of truth and love, unless they are simple and sentimental, are universal, and only justifiable and explicable in terms of idealism and mysticism. The sentimental view of life, leading to cynicism, with which he taxes humanists, is the very view

with which he is left when the support of his untenable position is withdrawn. The paradoxes in which he escapes recognition of these contradictions do not really effect a modern synthesis or show the modern relevance of orthodox Christian doctrines. Of course these doctrines are relevant in the sense that they deal with the human situation and with human experience, but when they are examined it is not their credentials which are dubious, the power to perform what they promise, but what they promise does not mean anything to any profound human purpose. It is impossible to be agnostic about the Christian faith: its claims and evidences demand to be accepted or rejected; and some humanists at any rate who reject them after prolonged and serious consideration do so not with the sadness and reluctance of one who would be glad to accept them but is not able to find the evidence good enough, but with the definitive decision of one who finds that they have no real meaning. This ultimate rejection is once for all and does not wait on further evidence. It is not of course obvious that a doctrine has no meaning; it has or has not meaning in relation to certain pre-suppositions and ultimates of thought. I have tried to indicate how the Christian scheme is not consistent with human experience, is a distortion of it and does not help to solve its problems. There are Protestant Christian apologists (like W. S. Urquhart in *Humanism and Christianity*) who assume or pretend that the rejection by humanists of Christian doctrine is out-of-date rationalism, the unnecessary caution of timidly sceptical and old-fashioned minds, and that humanists only need a little encouragement from Christians, and a little reassurance against the extremism of Barth, to make them glad to be able to "dispense with the limitations which it [humanism] has unnecessarily and illogically imposed on itself" and embrace a position in which "the truth of humanism is conserved, its errors removed, and its failures overcome". This view is an utter, although excusable, failure to understand what humanism means, and to recognize that Christianity is rejected not solely on grounds of evidence but mainly because its content is false. It is important that this misconception should be removed, for it is a waste of effort to proceed further on such assumptions. The practical problems of human living are indeed formidable, the great possibilities exceedingly difficult, and the dangers appalling: but the naturalism of modern secular thought has resources and is better able to cope with the situation than thought which, although historically venerable, is hopelessly inadequate, and may be dangerously misleading.

Beyond the scope of argument, at the bottom of the difference between Christians and humanists is a mass of feeling about the

world. There are indeed some who are humanists because their sense of evidence will not let them be Christians, and there are humanists who, knowing that human beings are physically incapable of any other life or any other conditions of life, have so learned to know and to love life in the world that they are spiritually incapable of wanting or liking the salvation of the gospel: in their skin is grained a mosaic of chequered experience, created and suffered, of concrete existence, and to their mind the mighty abstract existence of glorified Christian saints in the continual presence of God, like a dream, hangs to historical existence like drifts of fog under the drag of the land, like Virgil's wan and wistful *umbræ silentes*. Humanists of this sort compare with Christians as those who love and are long versed in music or painting with those who just like a tune or a picture. The comparison is unfair: probably Christians and humanists of the deeper sort are nearer to each other than they are to the ruck of others of their own persuasion: and probably the ruck of Christians and humanists are only formally divided from one another and spiritually separated from the subtle spirits in their own camp. But the comparison leads to the not unfair suggestion that from the humanist standpoint the Christian faith looks more respectable as starting-point than as goal of the pilgrim's progress; it seems at first sight to be a vital and valid ideal, but with long developed reflective experience, following a naturalistic grain, it loses both impulse and stamp and looks like a thin and unrelated idea, an emanation. Then the accumulated solidity of experience has a settled equilibruim in which it must persist; it cannot be turned on to another axis; it cannot be reinterpreted: it can only be destroyed.

H. J. BLACKHAM

BOOK REVIEWS

THE MIDDLE SPAN. By George Santayana. Constable, 8s. 6d.

Would it be too rash to suggest that *The Middle Span*, the second volume of Mr. Santayana's autobiography, could have been written only by a novelist? As one is tempted to say that his novel, *The Last Puritan*, could have been written only by a philosopher. However this may be, the charm with which Mr. Santayana combines the observation of the one with the reflection of the other is enhanced by his possession of a gift too often withheld from both: the gift of an incomparable style.

In the case of most authors the old saying that the style is the man is of doubtful truth and validity. Hence the danger of meeting our "favourite" author in the flesh. In him, as in anyone else, there may be more men than one, and the man of flesh and blood may, perhaps by an excess of these attributes, disappoint the expectations of the spirit. But in Mr. Santayana there is only one man. I make this statement, which may seem over bold, on the authority of Mr. Santayana himself. He believes he was born—he hints indeed (in brackets) at an origin earlier still—with a mentality that has undergone little modification in all the years of his well-filled life. He was born in 1863. In *Persons and Places*, the first volume of his autobiography, he says, "I think there was a congenital transcendentalism in me . . . I had a spontaneous feeling that life was a dream". To which it is well to add that he has previously said, "In spite of my daydreams, I was at bottom a young realist; I knew I was dreaming, and so was awake." In the present work, Mr. Santayana speaks of himself as a materialist, a cynic, a pessimist, but these discouraging terms are to be taken, I think, as loose disavowals of their even less reasonable opposites. Still they serve to prepare us for, though they do not justify, the predominant impression of the book. The impression, that is, of a profound and sustained detachment. Mr. Santayana might not care to take for his motto, "*Rien d'absolu, et une expérience toujours remise en question*": but so perfect a freedom as his from over-emphasis and over-insistence, so habitual an amenity, so rare a yielding to protest and complaint, are not easy to maintain without some such underlying conception.

This detachment may, as Mr. Santayana humorously suggests, have been his from birth. It is a trait he discovers in both his parents. In reflecting on their marriage, the only bond he can find between them is the bond of their common *détachment*. They separated within a few years of the marriage; his mother rejoined the relations of her first husband in Boston, leaving her son to spend

his childhood alone with his father in Avila. He was taken out to his mother when he was about twelve years old. His life has been one of rich opportunities. Avila in the old world, Boston and Harvard in the new, have offered contrasts of immense significance to his genius: but neither Spain nor New England, important as their influence may have been, has provided a final home for his spirit. Göttingen, Dresden, Berlin, London, Oxford, Paris have all contributed to the range and variety of his thought. In a word, whatever, Mr. Santayana may owe to heredity, his detachment is the fine fruit of a highly civilised experience, and, to a sensitive ear, his book may have the sad effect of the swan-like song of a culture that is passing away.

The narrative of *The Middle Span* is not chronological. Mr. Santayana has aimed at giving a continuity of interest rather than an exact succession of dates. "Germany", "London", "Boston Society", "Americans in Europe" are the headings of some of his chapters, and the impressions he records are seldom those of a single occasion.

The following is both so pleasant and so characteristic that it seems worth while to quote it.

"As for me, apart from the climate and the language, both entirely to my taste, there was the refinement, if not the *finesse* of English people in all their ways. They were certainly less disinterested than I, intellectually, morally and materially; and it was not from them that I wished to draw my ideas. But I respected and loved the English psyche, and the primacy there of the physical and moral nature over the intellectual. It was the safer order of things, more vital, more manly than the reverse. Man was not made to understand the world, but to live in it.

To which, as an example of his gift for atmosphere, one can't help adding:

"It was only on rare evenings in London that I dressed or dined with friends or went to any show. I tasted the specific quality of the place better when I strolled about alone, dined in some grill-room or in some restaurant in Soho, or walked out over the bridges to watch the evening glow reflected on the river. England preserves the softness and verdure of the country even in the city; and London, the densest of Babylons, is everywhere turned into a landscape by the mist, by the cloud-racks, by the docks and shipping towards the East, by the green reaches, the fields, the boating crowds towards the

West. It thins out and becomes rural imperceptibly in its immense suburbs, and not always vulgarly; there are royal preserves and stately seats in all directions."

It is in his portraits of relations and friends that the author of *The Last Puritan* most unmistakably reappears. Descriptions of people whom one does not know, and has no chance of knowing, may be as tedious as the photographs in a family album. But Mr. Santayana's relations and friends are drawn with the same unbiased penetration as the imaginary people in his novel, and the penetration in this case gains an additional piquancy from the fact that these people are real. Here are some of the things he says of his cousin Elvira, whom his father took him to visit on one of his returns to Avila.

"But the gossips this time were wrong. They didn't suspect the equal capacity of the fair Elvira, as yet unrevealed, for shedding yearly husbands. I have never heard of such a wealth of legal couplings as there were in her matrimonial circle. She was the fourth wife of her first husband, the second wife of her second, and the third wife of her third. She would remain each time childless, quietly smiling, and readier than ever to marry again.

"Though short and fat, Elvira had a pronounced feminine charm. There was something calm, friendly and sound about her person. Her clear white skin and no less clear brown eyes and soft curly brown hair gave her an air of neatness. . . Her small hands moved nimbly and touched pleasantly; and she had a way of folding scarf or shawl round her exuberant bosom that expressed happiness, grace, and almost humour."

Mr. Santayana has been fortunate in his friends. Among the portraits he gives us are those of many gifted, distinguished opulent, agreeable people, to whose attractive qualities he seems to give due prominence. But fidelity to fact is not always what the sitter most desires from the artist, and it may be that some of Mr. Santayana's subjects would have preferred a less discriminating judgment. But he is not likely to have given any deep offence. For the book owes much of its charm to the lightness of touch with which it is written, and if Mr. Santayana makes us enjoy the humour of his friends' predicaments, he also makes us enjoy the humour of his own. It is not the Harvard professor who tells the "tragic" story of that Sunday afternoon at Richmond. Through his inability to perform the acrobatic feat required of him, he plunged his friend, Lord Russell, "backwards head over heels" into the water a few feet from his electric launch. In the scene that followed philosophy was in

abeyance. But the friendship remained unimpaired. It is not often that we have a record of friendships so successful, so various, and, as in the case of Lord Russell, sometimes so unexpected.

It was with his half-sister, Susana Sturgis, that he had the most intimate tie, and of her he writes with a very sincere affection. I take this passage from the earlier work.

"Susana was still herself; we are always ourselves at bottom, however disfigured by the incrustations of life. She had been defeated by unhappy circumstances, forced out of her native element, denied the breathing space necessary to her nature; and charity will always judge a soul, not by what it has succeeded in fashioning externally, not by the body or the words or the works that are the wreck of its voyage, but by the elements of light and love that this soul infused into that inevitable tragedy."

For a final quotation I select the following passage, because, different as is the matter with which it deals, this too has the appearance of being written entirely from the heart:

In the matter of religion, I found myself in this blind alley. I was not a believer in what my religion, or any religion, teaches dogmatically; yet I wouldn't for the world have had a wife or children dead to religion. Had I lived always in Spain, even with my present philosophy, I should have found no difficulty: my family would have been Catholic like every other family; and the philosophy of religion, if ever eventually discussed among us, would have been a subsequent private speculation, with no direct social consequences. But living in a Protestant country, the free-thinking Catholic is in a socially impossible position. He cannot demand that his wife and children be Catholics, since he is not, in a controversial sense, a Catholic himself; yet he cannot bear that they should be Protestants or free-thinkers, without any Catholic tradition or feelings. They would not then be his wife and children except by accident: they would not belong to his people."

This passage occurs in connection with the nearest approach to a love episode that *The Middle Span* provides. In the days of his Harvard professorship, Mr. Santayana saw much of the "Boston ladies", and there was a "nascent sympathy", he tells us, between a certain distinguished heiress and himself. Though not insensitive to this opportunity, for various reasons, of which the religious difficulty was the most important, he did not allow the "nascent sympathy" to develop. His invincible detachment prevailed.

Mr. Santayana has not married.

R. O. PROWSE

A NEW THEORY OF HUMAN EVOLUTION. By Sir Arthur Keith. Pp. vii and 452. Watts and Co., 218.

Although in this new work Sir Arthur Keith ranges over practically the whole field of evolution as a subject, setting forth his own views upon each aspect, it is more particularly concerned with the development of his earlier views upon the utility of prejudice in the evolutionary process and with the development of what he terms a Group theory of evolution. Until comparatively recent times with the coming of the introduction of agricultural industry and the manufactures that went with it man lived in small groups of from fifty to a hundred persons. A group that flourished split into two owing to the impossibility of hunting and food gathering from a single base above a certain maximum of territory. Keith holds that the inbreeding afforded by the small group provided a forcing ground for evolution, favourable mutations being confined to a restricted field of genes thus hastening development of a type. On the other hand, groups badly situated with regard to quality of genes-supply would rapidly deteriorate and provide easy victims of the superior genes group. To make this group competitive system work there has been evolved in man a two-standard morality, with friendly and co-operative feelings for one's own group, hostility and enmity for one's enemies, the success of a group depending on having both these facets of character well developed. The determinations of the feelings for any particular group is purely arbitrary in the sense that it is merely a question whether that individual is a member of your group or not. For example, if two public motor vehicles come into collision it will usually be found that everyone involved will be quite determined that it was not their driver who was to blame though they do not know him nor will ever ride in his vehicle again. There is an instinctive feeling towards unity of any group however formed, and the smaller the group the stronger the bond. In no two groups is the genes composition the same, however random the selection, and this must lead to variation. Keith holds that new communities mean new types of man; communities and nations are constantly in the process of formation. In recent times whole continents and sub-continents have seen a complete change in the type of population inhabiting them, the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, are examples.

The theory of the advantages of the small group in the evolutionary process is bound up with the discounting of sexual selection as a major factor in evolution. Keith takes the view that the group is the thing rather than the individual, incidentally, a democratic view. How is one then to account for long lines of heritable

special ability? There are, for example, the English political families, the Cecils, the Russells, the Cavendishes, and the Stanleys, in which generation after generation outstanding abilities of a specific character are manifested, and is it not likely that breeding is just as true in persons in stations of life less conspicuous? Is this a case of sexual selection, like seeking like, or is it due to inbreeding? The latter is possible, inbreeding being much more prevalent than might at first sight appear. Political boundaries mean little in breeding, propinquity both geographic and social being the limiting factor. This militates to a degree against the argument of the small group's advantage over the larger.

What does seem certain is that the larger the political group the greater the diversity of types that can be produced. Eccentricity can have but a very limited scope in a small group of a hundred persons. Oddities cannot be carried by a little community, as there cannot be much departure from the norm current at any given time. If favourable mutations develop more rapidly in the confined genes-pool of a small group, is it not true to say the more varied conditions of the big group provide the conditions in which more mutations can be favourable mutations than is the case with the small group? While it may be asked whether the large group gives scope for fresh mutations it must be admitted that civilization lowers the standards at which human life can subsist. A really high level of machine production would allow of a large part of the population being of idiot level owing to the excess wealth that could be diverted to their subsistence.

Sir Arthur Keith will no doubt annoy a lot of people with this work as with some of his earlier ones, owing to his recognition of the beneficial role of the aggressive instincts. Man does not like his own portrait if it be a truthful likeness, the idealized picture being a far more palatable article. One therefore gets either, as with Christians, a poor view taken of man, or the attitude so frequently adopted by humanists that the aggressive and competitive manifestations in man are merely cultural in character and can be eliminated. Although there is a wide formal acceptance of evolution, its application to man has never been a reality to many, particularly in relation to the current scene. Evolution is something that happened in the past if it happened at all. Keith rightly claims credit for seeing evolution as something that is alive and going on apace to-day. The ground covered by this work is so wide and its nature so speculative in character that it is bound to be vulnerable to criticism in detail and no doubt the author recognises this. Keith is a Scot, which is almost more of an occupation than a nationality, who spent his early years on a farm and it is to these

factors that much of this vivid interest in man in evolution may be attributable.

M. L. BURNET

STANTON COIT, 1857-1944. Selections from his writings, edited, with a prefatory memoir, by H. J. Blackham. (Favil Press, cloth 5s., paper 2s. 6d.)

"In the interests both of his memory and of the Ethical Movement which he served, it is his faith in eternal values which stands for examination, for by that his life's work stands or falls. Therefore after a summary narrative of the events of his life, I shall devote this memoir to an examination of that faith." So writes Mr. Blackham and this book should be read by all for the sake of his examination of the nature and function of permanent ideals or eternal values. He does not himself accept the idealist philosophy which seemed to Dr. Coit to describe and express the binding validity of ultimate ideals and yet he believes that man has discovered certain principles which "demand unqualified, unreserved self-commitment, because whether they are realised or not, they alone give human life whatever worth it can have." It is the apprehension of these ideals which is the source of humanist religion and this was the enduring truth which should be treasured in Dr. Coit's work.

It was natural, Mr. Blackham explains, that the idealist philosophy which was prevalent when Dr. Coit was a student in Berlin should have been used by him in expounding the validity of universal ideals and their compelling power over the minds of those who discern them. What struck him most deeply was the way in which ideals impinge upon the mind, "To contemplate them with no intention of making them regulative principles of action betokens or induces, derangement of the mind", he wrote in a passage included amongst the extracts in this book under the heading "The Rational Value of Religious Practice." And again, "They are motives to enterprise and also instantaneous and all satisfying possessions, to have gained which requires no time or means. One moment the Ideal spurs to action and the next stills all striving." It is clear that experience tempted the author of these and succeeding passages to see in idealist philosophy something much more than fiction. For him ideals took on independent being—"felt" at times "to be close over our heads, pouring ineffable grace into us."

Mr. Blackham sticks closely to the view that ideals are conclusions drawn by man from reflection upon experience, his discovery of the universal and basic principles of living which make a worth while life possible for human beings. They are "sacred

formulas". But his language takes on the same religious ring as Dr. Coit's and to the uncareful reader might even suggest that he also conceived of ideals as active entities making demands upon us: "To become conscious of these permanent ideals of human life, and by reflection, discussion, and action to become increasingly and profoundly aware of the nature and extent of their demands upon oneself and upon one's contemporaries in the existing situation, to bear witness to them, and to act in response to their challenge: this is the religious life, and it is not solitary, but social and implies a social formation."

To Dr. Coit such a social formation was a Church and the real function of a church was to stimulate, clarify and sustain social idealism by every influence which a group organised for the purpose could bring to bear upon its members. Mr. Blackham gives a brief but vivid account of Dr. Coit's practical aspirations from 1894 to 1914. Extracts from *National Idealism and a State Church* give ample proof of the correctness of this account. He believed in the idea of a national Church because he saw that in fact the nation is the spiritual unit whose interacting parts form the social influence which shapes the individual. The nation should therefore be organised to fulfil this function well. He also believed that through the Broad Church party the Anglican Church might discard all supernatural beliefs and become a truly national, humanist, ethical Church. His idea in building up the Ethical Church and elaborating its services was to give the example and challenge which would galvanise the Anglican Church to adopt this revolutionary course. In his own mind the church would still be fulfilling the mission of Christ by so doing.

Mr. Blackham defends this now strange-seeming hope, showing its roots in Coleridge and Mill. "There was a sane and statesman-like conception in all this which might have had a triumphant success", he says. "He was making a bid for national acceptance of the ethical-social interpretation of religion, and doing it in terms of history and institutions with a profound sense of the trend of social development." Yet he profoundly misjudged future developments within the Christian Churches, and according to Mr. Blackham this mistake arose from a failure in psychological insight into what the Christian religion meant to the believer. In this Mr. Blackham is undoubtedly right. And this failure is closely linked with another mistake which Mr. Blackham considers he made. He failed to see how utterly different is a religion which springs from the recognition of valid ideals from one which springs from belief in God. He thought ideals were much more like God than Mr. Blackham thinks they are, and he thought men could and should worship them as

they used to worship God. It was partly this mistake which made him think that Christians might come to realise they had always been worshipping ideals in the image of God. But to Mr. Blackham ideals are not objects a person could worship. They are abstractions. Man has grasped one aspect of the way in which life ought to be lived, he has formulated a universal principle about it, seen the eternal value of this aspect of right living and in so doing has formulated the permanent ideal of truth or beauty or goodness. Such fundamental, universal, abiding ideas are "sacred formulas" of human experience in accordance with which we develop our spirits, shape our characters and guide our lives. As such they are not ends in themselves but instruments of living. "They throw us," he says, "into the task of creating a life worthy to be called human and in the concrete situations in which we live we prove their regenerative, formative, fertilising virtue. Thus they are creative elements in the religious life, . . . but they are not the object of religious experience. The object of ethical religion is a complete life . . . It is an object which is experienced in being created."

Mr. Blackham having discarded the idealist metaphysics used by Dr. Coit and having known the quality of Christian belief when taken seriously himself, sees the gulf between the two more sharply than did Dr. Coit. But he shows insight as a biographer by pointing out that Dr. Coit's concern with Christianity did not arise from the nostalgic aftermath of shattered Christian belief. On the contrary he looked at Christianity from the outside, from the overflowing certainty of his idealism "seeing theology as the projection of moral ideas emanating from social experience." With an apt touch of humour Mr. Blackham remarks that "From this point of view it was natural that he should want to put the church right, so to speak, to make everyone see what had been happening and what the Church was actually doing, so that it might do it more effectively with fully explicit consciousness and in real terms."

And yet does not Mr. Blackham make him out too completely the rational statesman even in his mistakes? He did not hanker after Christian beliefs at all, but he did feel that the church music of the sixteen, the church architecture of the thirteen, the Liturgy of the Anglican Church and even the ritual of the Roman Church gave artistic expression to spiritual experiences in which he felt he shared. He longed to be able to keep these artistic expressions as expressions of religion as he conceived it. He could not believe that those who felt the compelling and inspiring quality of ideals were spiritually divorced from the builders and carvers of Chartres or from Palestrina, Byrd and Tallis. It is extremely hard to say how far he was right or wrong in this. Mr. Blackham declares ideals not

to be objects of worship but even he calls them sacred and the expression of a sense of the sacredness of those ideals in response to whose demands upon us we live might perhaps be hard to distinguish from a mass by Byrd. Dr. Coit undoubtedly shrank from excommunication from the Christian heritage. He shrank from the word atheist, he felt he was and wished to be in the direct line of descent from Christianity, despite his bitter opposition to Theism. His attitude was more baffling, more human and more intriguing than is allowed for in Mr. Blackham's admirable presentation. But Mr. Blackham is even more concerned with the rights and wrongs of his policy than with the complex workings of his mind.

Of all the extracts those from *National Idealism and a State Church* are most original and most startling: "The real organic unit of religious life, of which any man is a member, is always the nation to which he belongs, in so far as the nation stands for social and personal ideals and principles". Conflict within the nation does not disrupt the essential unity of the interacting parties. In his attempt to focus attention upon the actual social spiritual influences of the actual organised society he seems to have had no thought for the supernational cultural influences of a Christendom lacking social organisation. But he was, of course, aware of them and of the interplay of thought across national frontiers in his day. The book was written in 1907 and there was considerable realism in picking out the nation as the actual formative group at that time—and still is. In doing this he seemed to play into the hands of outrageous nationalism and was attacked for so doing after 1914. But on the basis of respect for every nationality he became an explicit supporter of international order and co-operation. We have become more aware of a common "Western" heritage and more utterly dependent upon the development of supernational organization and we are also more aware of the terrifying potentiality of a nation organised as a spiritual unit. To-day it would seem both realistic and inadequate to accept the nation as the organic unit of spiritual life to which each of us belongs.

It is well to turn from these subtleties to what Mr. Blackham formulates as the two main contentions of his thought: (1) that moral effects fall far short of what they should be unless there is statesmanlike understanding of the social causes which produce them; (2) that there is universal capacity for moral insight, for discerning and responding to good and evil, which is the sanity of the world and the inviolable principle of personality. The extracts are chosen to represent these two contentions. They are most clearly expressed in the extracts from two essays on Ethical democracy, one written in 1900 and the other in 1937. In these extracts

the two contentions appear closely interwoven: the universal capacity is there but it needs educating. The whole social-political economic structure should be shaped to give scope and responsibility in society to all, for morality implies self-activity and self-direction. But "it is difficult to imagine how any spiritual lever except democratic religion, education and recreation can raise men to an intelligence and character equal to the task of democratising industry." So he wrote in 1900. In the later essay he explicitly avows his belief in an evil tendency in every human being, "It is because this principle really exists and is an active power in the human heart, that it is essential to popular government that all individuals in the nation shall from the beginning have the perception of right and wrong trained to the uttermost, in order that this perception may awaken a disinterested loyalty to good and loathing for the despicable and dangerous instincts of self-display, love of power and jealousy of rivals." Should such training fail there is no other hope for man. The possibility of failure did not frighten him into thinking there might be some supernatural regenerative power at hand. He had trained himself to live beyond hope and fear in his fundamental outlook if not in particular cases. "What ought-to-be, although it never is to be, is a more than adequate inspiration and we need no reassurance as to the outcome of our effort; whereas hope, when adversity confronts us, transforms itself into fear, and, when hope is strongest, it is most misleading and most prone to delusion and to blindness." So he wrote in his own unfinished autobiography.

VIRGINIA FLEMING

ON UNDERSTANDING SCIENCE. By James B. Conant. O.U.P. pp. xv, 142. 10s. 6d.

SCIENCE AND HUMANITY. By F. B. Welbourn. S.C.M. Press. pp. 121. 4s.

To speak of the problem of general education in a free society is a useful formulation of the essential question in education to-day, because it indicates the main difficulty: how to achieve a common education which is more than a general list of specialisms without imposing a ready-made philosophy. Harvard has already contributed a notable study of the question and in these Terry Lectures the President of Harvard returns to the particular problem of giving an understanding of science to college students whose higher education is in other fields. A universal understanding of science would be a step on the way to "a unified, coherent culture suitable for . . . democracy in this new age of machines and experts."

Dr. Conant begins by clearing away two assumptions which falsify the whole outlook: (1) that scientists are more rational than other people and from them alone is to be learned the rational temper; (2) that scientific method can be generalized, acquired and applied. He derives the rational temper from philosophers and natural sceptics rather than from technical scientists; and the succession of brilliant discoveries which makes the triumphant history of science seen in reverse, looked at as they are traced forward in detail are seen as the fragmentary successes of chequered advance, more like persistent blind groping than the confident following of an infallible clue. The real character of science can only be adequately taught by detailed study of the case-histories of which the history of science is made. Dr. Conant's lectures exemplify the application of this principle with detailed treatment of selected case-histories. There is no possibility of teaching "scientific method", but there can be exemplification and analytical study of the tactics and strategy of science.

Mr. Welbourn's book is also about a unified coherent culture suitable for this new age of machines and experts. He is professionally both a physicist and a clergyman, concerned with the present state of the old conflict between science and religion, and with the place of science and religion in modern culture and education. He has no difficulty in showing the confusions and cross-purposes which make the debate in the modern conflict, and that little can be hoped for at the level of argument. "It is one of the symptoms of a disintegrating culture that men trained in different disciplines find it almost impossible to communicate at any deep level of thought; and arguments which appear thoroughly satisfactory to minds used to current theological thought and language, carry no conviction to those which have been trained in a laboratory. There is, in fact, no common ground of reasonable argument; the roots of reason lie at a deeper level of the personality, where varying temperament and the unconscious influence of environment and professional activity are dominant. What seems reasonable to any man is relative to the life he leads; and, ultimately, in the relations between Christianity and science, there is no reconciliation except in the persons of Christians who live their religion and work out their theology against a background of scientific training and profession." This is candid and personal, the justification of his book. It amounts, in his expansion of the theme, to an invitation to theologians to take science seriously and to get to understand it thoroughly from within; and to scientists to recognise and examine the assumptions they are making if they reject Christianity, since they will be embracing by implication some other religion or pseudo-religion

less rational. "The point at issue is whether the universe is adequately described in the current scientific categories or whether it is sacramental, the self-expression of personality." His own argument for the Christian view based on the reasonableness of personalism is supported by the necessary distinction between knowledge as specific information and knowledge as immediate experience. This necessary distinction, however, does not necessarily lead to the conclusions he desires. He returns at the end to the place of science in modern culture and education. "Science is no longer, as it was perhaps even fifteen years ago, one educational discipline to be set beside another, equally influencing the growing mind; it is a vast social force with which all other disciplines must come to terms, if they are to modify its determination of culture." Dr. Conant sees, and wishes to facilitate, the assimilation of science in the general body of modern culture. Mr. Welbourn sees, and wishes to facilitate, the assimilation of culture in the general body of modern science. This project is made tolerable to himself by a scheme of education in which science is made the instrument of a humane and whole experience, and of course in his own mind such an education finds a reasonable consummation in the Christian faith. His scheme is the obverse as well as the converse of Dr. Conant's, providing for the specialist in science a humane education. This last constructive section of the book, entitled "A New Humanity", is the author's solution of the problem of general education in a free society. The solution is more alarming than the problem; rather, it brings home the gravity of the problem. It is like accepting world conquest as the solution of the problem of world peace. It is a radical solution, and it may be the only solution: remedies may be worse than diseases. The growing domination of science over educated minds may oust the humanities, and Christianity and the history of science may come to be taken as more than adequate compensation for their loss. It is not perhaps likely, but anything may happen. Meanwhile, Dr. Conant's solution is more civilized.

H.J.B.

CORRESPONDENCE

Man His Own Master

M. L. Burnet is entitled to criticize me, but not to misrepresent me. In my book I nowhere characterize Mussolini as a Christian. On the contrary I call him an unbeliever (p. 115) and show (p. 138) that he used Catholicism solely as a dope for others. As to Hitler, he was a Catholic by breeding, derived his anti-Semitism from the Catholic Lüger, and was never excommunicated or even censured by the Church in his lifetime.

Nor do I anywhere lump Christians together as "in the service of the Enemy of mankind." On the contrary, on pp. 41-46 I give the strong points of Christianity due credit.

It is, no doubt, unfortunate that I should have written a book against religious reaction instead of against the political doctrines that M. L. Burnet dislikes. But the R.P.A. happened to commission me to do so. Sorry!

ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON

Deadly Sins

In your April issue Sir Richard Gregory makes the following statement: "In medieval times the seven deadly sins were personified as Pride, Lechery, Envy, Anger, Covetousness, Gluttony and Sloth. Several of these would scarcely be called deadly sins to-day; and the list omits murder and adultery."

It is always a matter of deep regret to me when spokesmen for the Ethical Movement repeat popular errors about Christian doctrine. It justifies instructed Christians in saying that the Ethical Movement is led by people who have not even made an accurate study of the teachings which they criticize and at which they not infrequently presume to sneer.

The Church divides sins into those which are "mortal", i.e. mortaliferous, leading to the death of the soul, and those which are "venial." There is no specified number of mortal or of venial sins; the same sin may be mortal on one occasion and venial on another, depending on circumstances. Tertullian spoke of seven deadly sins by which he meant open and scandalous sins requiring public penance. His list has nothing to do with the list referred to by Sir Richard Gregory.

The seven sins enumerated by Sir Richard are not "deadly" sins but "capital" sins, i.e. "root sins" from which all other sins proceed. Murder and adultery are quite properly not included, because they

are not "roots" but "fruits"—murder, for instance, may very obviously be the fruit of any one of the seven capital sins.

Far from being out-dated, the medieval list shows great psychological insight, the seven capital sins being closely linked with the seven primary impulses to action—positive self-feeling, self-preservation, sex, pugnacity, acquisitiveness, hunger and thirst, and negative self-feeling.

Our Movement will command more respect in educated circles when Ethical speakers and writers take as their motto the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: "Until you understand a man's ignorance, consider yourself ignorant of his understanding."

W. EDWIN COLLIER

XENOPHANES OF COLOPHON

(c. 530 B.C.)

. . . if oxen (and horses) and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen of gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the form that each species itself possesses. .

Aethiopians have gods with snub noses and black hair, Thracians have gods with grey eyes and red hair.

Truly the gods have not revealed to mortals all things from the beginning; but mortals by long seeking discover what is better.

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